This is a digital copy of a book that was preserved for generations on library shelves before it was carefully scanned by Google as part of a project to make the world's books discoverable online.

It has survived long enough for the copyright to expire and the book to enter the public domain. A public domain book is one that was never subject to copyright or whose legal copyright term has expired. Whether a book is in the public domain may vary country to country. Public domain books are our gateways to the past, representing a wealth of history, culture and knowledge that's often difficult to discover.

Marks, notations and other marginalia present in the original volume will appear in this file - a reminder of this book's long journey from the publisher to a library and finally to you.

Usage guidelines

Google is proud to partner with libraries to digitize public domain materials and make them widely accessible. Public domain books belong to the public and we are merely their custodians. Nevertheless, this work is expensive, so in order to keep providing this resource, we have taken steps to prevent abuse by commercial parties, including placing technical restrictions on automated querying.

We also ask that you:

+ *Make non-commercial use of the files* We designed Google Book Search for use by individuals, and we request that you use these files for personal, non-commercial purposes.

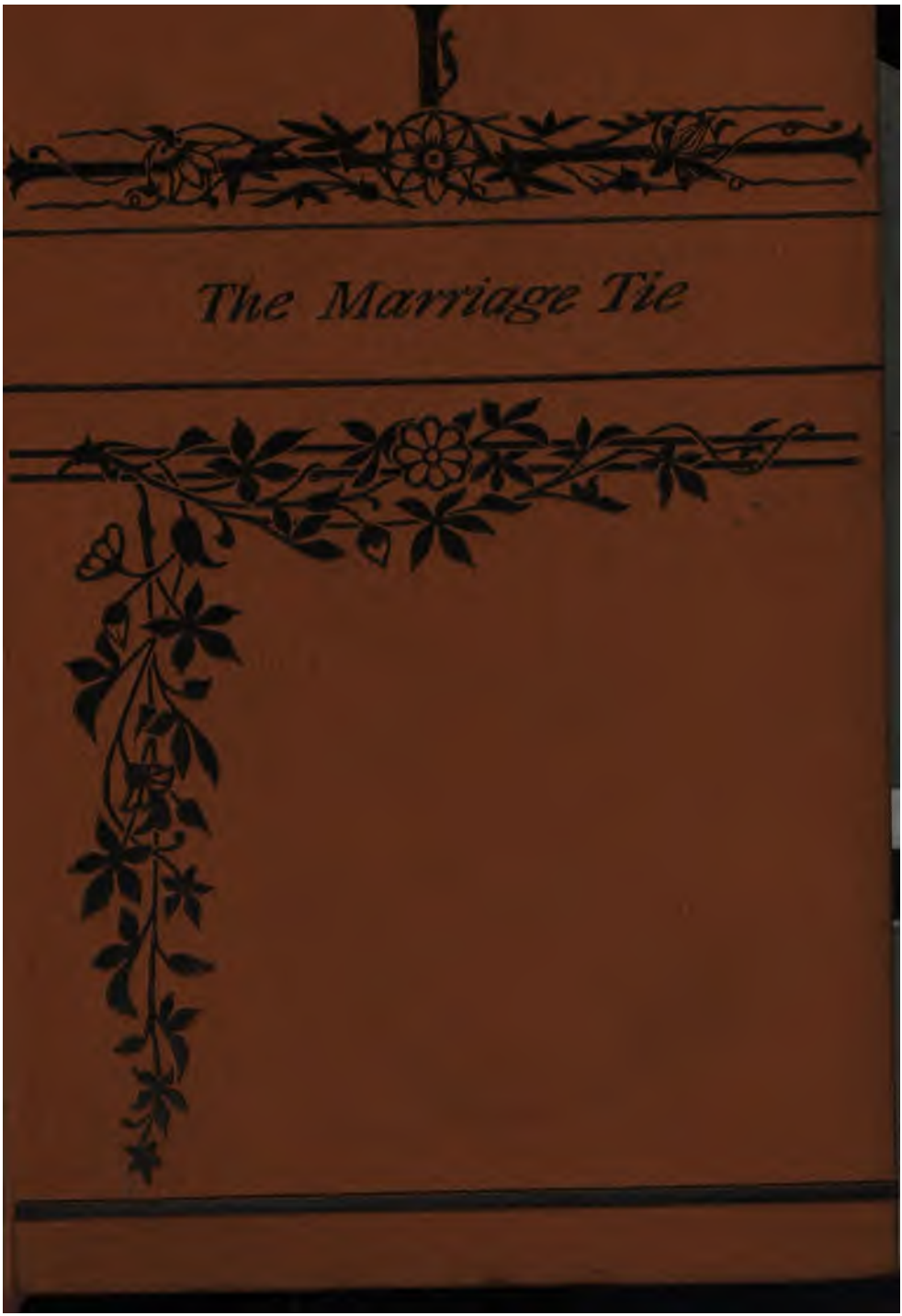
+ *Refrain from automated querying* Do not send automated queries of any sort to Google's system: If you are conducting research on machine translation, optical character recognition or other areas where access to a large amount of text is helpful, please contact us. We encourage the use of public domain materials for these purposes and may be able to help.

+ *Maintain attribution* The Google "watermark" you see on each file is essential for informing people about this project and helping them find additional materials through Google Book Search. Please do not remove it.

+ *Keep it legal* Whatever your use, remember that you are responsible for ensuring that what you are doing is legal. Do not assume that just because we believe a book is in the public domain for users in the United States, that the work is also in the public domain for users in other countries. Whether a book is still in copyright varies from country to country, and we can't offer guidance on whether any specific use of any specific book is allowed. Please do not assume that a book's appearance in Google Book Search means it can be used in any manner anywhere in the world. Copyright infringement liability can be quite severe.

About Google Book Search

Google's mission is to organize the world's information and to make it universally accessible and useful. Google Book Search helps readers discover the world's books while helping authors and publishers reach new audiences. You can search through the full text of this book on the web at `http://books.google.com/`


The Marriage Tie

THE MARRIAGE TIE.

From the German of

JOHANNES VON DEWALL.

BY

K. E. STANTIAL.

'As gold is tried by the fire
So the heart must be tried by pain.'

IN TWO VOLUMES.
VOL II.

London:
REMINGTON AND CO.,
5, ARUNDEL STREET, STRAND, W.C.
1879.
[*All Rights Reserved.*]

251. f. 483.

Shortly. At Every Library.

A PARISIAN SULTANA.

A Novel.

From the French of

ADOLPHE BELOT

BY

H. MAINWARING DUNSTAN.

3 Vols., 31s. 6d.

This novel is now in its twelfth edition in Paris, the first edition having been published there only last season.

REMINGTON & Co., 5, Arundel Street, Strand, W.C.

CONTENTS OF VOL. II.

CHAPTER		PAGE
I.	LIGHT IN THE GLOOM	5
II.	THE MYSTERY SOLVED	23
III.	THE PRINCESS'S VISIT	39
IV.	THE BARON'S STORY	55
V.	THE BARON'S DEATH	87
VI.	RE-UNITED	101
VII.	THE PRINCESS AT FLORENCE	121
VIII.	THE LOVE-MATCH	135
IX.	JEALOUSY	163
X.	THE CLOUD DARKENS	177
XI.	THE SEPARATION	191
XII.	THE WEB OF TREACHERY	217
XIII.	THE CLOUD WITH THE SILVER LINING	231

THE MARRIAGE TIE.

CHAPTER I.

LIGHT IN THE GLOOM.

'Then followed counsel, comfort, and the words
That make a man feel strong in speaking truth.'

THE MARRIAGE TIE.

CHAPTER I.

LIGHT IN THE GLOOM.

THE care of the two sick people occupied all my time and attention. The greater part of the day I spent in the Baron's room, giving him his medicine, and handing him the cooling drinks, for which he so often stretched out his burning hand. During the nights, also, I watched alternately by his bed.

He seemed to recognise me, but he could not speak; the wound prevented him, for when the bandage was removed, the air poured out of his shattered lung.

Frequently, also, I sat by the bed of the stranger, who lay there, pale and wasted, like a waxen image—an object of compassion.

I had conceived a strong prejudice against this man, a bitter aversion. What a wretch he must be, to have led such a woman astray! He had shaken my belief in virtue and womanhood—had robbed me!

Good God! How was it possible that the unhappy lady could love this man—love him even to madness! With what eyes does a woman see! Handsome,

intellectual, distinguished men had offered their homage to her, had laid themselves at her feet, had striven for a glance from her dark eyes. With one look she had repulsed them, coldly, haughtily! And now?—unfortunate fascination!—now she had given her heart away to this pitiable object, had thrown it after a shadow! Was it conceivable—was it possible so to love this man, upon whom Death already seemed to have laid his hand? Or, are pity and love so closely connected in a woman's heart?

In the 'Midsummer Night's Dream,' Shakespeare makes Titania fall in love with an ass—that is a play of the imagination. But was not the reality here even more strange, more fantastical?

These yellow, emaciated features; this mass of tangled hair; this rough, grey-besprinkled beard; these hollow cheeks; these sunken eyes surrounded by deep shadows—how could a woman see these without feeling something like horror?

My gaze dwelt long and inquiringly upon those pale features, not only in the bright light of day, but also during the long hours of the night, when I sat quietly by his couch; while the monotonous tick of the clock alone broke the death-like stillness, and the glimmer of the night-lamp sparsely illumined the darkness.

In vain I sought the solution of the enigma; I found it nowhere.

It was but very gradually that I felt my first impression of aversion pass away, but

after a time I looked at him with other eyes. I now discovered that, in spite of the wasted expression, the features were noble, the forehead was highly arched, the nose fine and well cut. There was something very touching, very expressive, in the look of those deep-sunken eyes when the heavy blue-veined lids were raised for a moment.

But where could she have learnt to know him? Where could he have obtained such power over her? How had it all happened?

So I thought, so I asked myself, for hours together, while the clock, with monotonous strokes, marked the course of time. But all still remained wrapped in the same impenetrable darkness.

And must it always be so?

No! God be praised! Light came at last—light to illumine the gloom.

One morning the Doctor came to me with a very excited air.

'A wonder!' he cried; 'the Baron is better. He has taken something to eat, his eye is clearer, he seems to have regained full consciousness. Come with me, and see for yourself.'

When we entered the sick-room, the Baron lay with his eyes wide open. He immediately fixed his look upon me; it was evident that he knew me; the expression of his countenance changed, and he attempted with a feeble movement to stretch out his hands to me.

I was deeply touched by that look—it

said so plainly: 'So this is how you find me again, an unhappy, a dying man.'

I stepped up to the bed, bent down, and laid my hand upon his.

'How are you—what can I do for you?' I asked, with emotion.

He seemed to wish to raise himself, to say something, but he could only move his head, for a cough, which brought the blood-stained foam to his lips, immediately stopped his utterance. Impatiently he wrinkled his brow, damp from weakness, still looking at me, as if to say: 'You see how it is.'

He lay thus quiet for a time, holding my hand in his, and I could hear the sound of the air rattling through his wounded lung.

My heart bled for him, I dared not speak, and looked mournfully from the Baron to the Doctor. The latter gave him a spoonful of lemonade, and said emphatically:

'You must not excite yourself in the least, if you wish to get well.'

The sick man appeared not to hear his words; he stared gloomily before him for a short space, then suddenly pressed my hand again, and signified his wish to write something.

While I was seeking the pencil and paper, I thought, with an oppression at my heart: In mercy, what are we about to learn?

The Baron wrote.

We both watched him, the Doctor and

I; we had the same thought—what fearful thing will be revealed to us?

With much exertion he traced several lines on the paper, slowly and feebly, his features still retaining their former expression of gloom. At last his hand fell languidly on the coverlet, and he looked at me with an expression of deep sorrow.

'Shall I take the paper?' I inquired.

He made a weak attempt to hand it to me.

'Shall I read it?'

His eyes looked 'Yes.'

With a trembling hand I seized the important paper; my heart almost stopped beating. I read:

'I myself am the author of my death.

It was an unfortunate accident. The pistol slipped from my hand as I stepped over the threshold, and went off as it struck the ground. I swear this, on my honour.'

One can imagine how I felt, what a burden was lifted from my soul, as I glanced at these lines.

'God be ever praised and thanked!' I exclaimed, with eyes raised on high. 'So this is the solution of the mystery!'

I had first read it to myself, then I read it aloud. The Baron's eyes were fixed with an almost agonised expression, now upon me, now upon the Doctor. When I had finished reading he raised his hand slightly with the fingers outspread, as if

taking his oath, then let it fall heavily upon the bed.

There he lay for some time, while we were speechless from agitation. He pointed first to his wounded breast, and then upwards, as if calling Heaven to witness that the words he had written were the truth.

'Must I die?' he inquired at last, by a gesture which we understood.

The Doctor bent down to him and said:

'Your wound is very dangerous, Baron, but not absolutely mortal; if you will guard yourself from any agitation, there is a possibility that we may save you.'

The hand upon the bed moved backwards and forwards, as if in unbelief.

'Will you not write something more,

Baron?' I asked, 'or shall I add something for you?'

He understood me; he lay still for a while, with damp brow and compressed lips, in conflict with himself. Once more he signed for the pencil.

There was deep stillness in the room—slowly his hand moved over the paper, now stopping a moment, now continuing to trace the characters.

At last it was done. I took the paper and read:

'My last will remains unaltered—it is deposited at Riga—I forgive all mankind—even my wife!'

He raised his head slightly, then let it

fall back heavily and painfully; his eyes closed.

The Doctor beckoned me on one side.

'For Heaven's sake!' he said, 'the most absolute rest now, otherwise I will not be answerable for the consequences.' He drew me towards the door, adding, in a whisper: 'Let us rejoice that we have this,' pointing to the paper.

'What a favour from Heaven!' I murmured, as I went out; 'this bit of paper is worth all the treasures in the world. Let us both put our names to it, and I will hasten to the Baroness and the President.'

'What has happened?' said a voice behind me.

I turned, and saw the Baroness with her large, gleaming eyes fixed anxiously upon me.

I seized her hand.

'Let us thank God,' I said, with much emotion, and led her to her room.

'Read here, gracious lady.'

She sank into a chair; her gaze wandered quickly over the paper; she heaved a deep sigh; her eyes filled with tears.

'Even my wife!' she groaned.

'Dear lady!' I said, deeply touched.

She looked at me for a moment through a veil of tears—a look of heavy sorrow, of deep reproach; then she turned away her head, made a movement with her hand as if to keep me back, and with trembling steps left the room.

'Lovely, unhappy being!' my lips murmured, and I could have sunk on my knees and pressed my lips to the spot which her foot had touched—have implored her to pardon me. For now I felt assured, now I was certain as if an angel had told me: This woman is innocent!

The mystery shall be solved, it shall be my most eager endeavour to unravel it; nor will I rest, day or night, until I have found the key.

I stood there for a time severely blaming myself, and yet, at the same moment, rejoicing that I had once more regained my faith.

I lifted up the paper, which had fallen to the ground; I kissed the tear-stains upon

it, and hastened at once to the Princess and the President to show them this invaluable document, and to say to them, 'The Baroness is innocent!'

CHAPTER II.

THE MYSTERY SOLVED.

'I strove to pierce a mystery,
And lo! the clue is given.'

CHAPTER II.

THE MYSTERY SOLVED.

So passed several days. Curiosity was still at its height in the town.

So the Baron had wounded himself by an unlucky accident, they said. Well! But how had that happened? Granted, that the pistol had fallen from his hand, and in the sudden movement had gone off as it struck the ground—nothing more probable.

But how came it that the Baron had

entered the other man's room at all with a pistol in his hand? And what could he have seen there, that it should have slipped from his grasp? Some terrible sight must have met his gaze to cause such an accident to happen.

No! This Baroness! Who would have thought it?

That American is an enviable fellow; he has supplanted them all!

What interesting material was this for the scandal-loving multitude, whose imagination revels in piquant situations; for the gossips in Neckar Street; for the old women at the cafés!

But there were also more serious persons who reasoned thus: The Baron is a man of honour; he shelters his wife; he

takes the whole blame upon his own shoulders; he will not let a blemish rest upon his name. A brave man—a real nobleman—true as steel.

But one day the wind suddenly veered round. The Baron, in a marvellous manner, began to recover, was able to take food; his iron nature laughed to scorn the Doctor's predictions. The fever left him, the leaden hue of his countenance began to assume a slight tinge of colour, and his eyes brightened.

One day, as I was leaving him, he held me fast by the arm.

'Bagdanoff, a clergyman,' he said faintly, with an attempt to raise himself.

It was the first word he had spoken

since that fearful night. I stood as if rooted to the spot. One thought shot like an arrow into my mind.

'Will you not first speak to your wife?' I asked earnestly, and looked imploringly at him.

He gazed sadly before him for a while, pressing his folded hands closely together. He seemed to be struggling with himself. I could tell that by the rising and falling of his breast, and by the changeful expression of his features. Suddenly his eyes became fixed, he unclasped his hands, and made an energetic movement.

'No!' he burst forth in a sharp, harsh tone.

It cut me to the heart, though I had almost feared such an answer.

Since the Baron had regained his consciousness his wife was obliged to keep carefully away from him ; the sight of her excited him. I had noticed several times when she entered how the sick man's eyes immediately fixed themselves upon her with a strange, reproachful expression ; how uneasy he became if she drew near him, or spoke to him. The unhappy lady at last no longer ventured into his room, though her heart and duty alike called her there. She could see for herself the influence her presence had upon the invalid.

At last she only came when he was asleep. She would then sit as still as a statue by his couch, like a Niobe, remaining there sometimes for hours in a painful stupor.

It was quite evident that her husband cherished a deep, unconquerable feeling of aversion against her, under which she suffered unutterably.

When I thought of the fatherly affection he had always shown to his lovely young wife, and how that he himself was so near the brink of the grave, I hoped that I might still be able to induce him to speak a word to her before he saw the clergyman. There must surely be many things to be explained between them; perhaps she might be able to lessen the burden on his soul. It would give him some comfort, some consolation, could he but know her to be less guilty.

The tears came into my eyes, my heart was full.

'Forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive them that trespass against us,' I repeated slowly, and held his hand fast in mine.

He knit his dark brows and set his face in the terrible conflict; his features seemed carved in stone. He lay for some minutes without moving, then his breast heaved, and violent bodily pain loosed the tension.

'I *have* forgiven her,' said he, with much difficulty, 'but I will not see her, or speak to her; there is too much between us. It is better so, Bagdanoff—fetch me a clergyman, a grave, prudent man.'

While he thus spoke he did not look at me, but gazed gloomily before him into vacancy. His cough came on, causing

him great pain; speaking had evidently much exhausted him.

'I will do your bidding, Herr von Maszmann,' I said, in much anxiety, as I noticed how the suffering disfigured his features. 'I will hasten at once, do not be uneasy.'

I was about to go, but he still held my hand firmly, and seemed to wish to say something else. But the words would not come—breath failed him. At last he whispered:

'My honour—is to me—before everything.'

His voice was like the rustle of a leaf in the evening breeze, but it found an echo.

I turned round in terror.

There stood the Baroness. She had

heard the cough, and, in her anxiety, had entered the room without our perceiving her. Softly as his words had been spoken, they reached her ears. With hands clasped over her pale brow, she stood there. For a moment it seemed as if grief and shame would annihilate her. She trembled like a willow before the storm; her frame quivered with anguish.

But it was only for a moment.

Before I could reach her side, or hinder her, she threw herself on her knees by her husband's bed.

'Forgive—Rudolph—forgive me!' she implored, in a tone of heart-rending sorrow. 'I have been a coward, thoughtless, but, believe me, Rudolph, never dishonoured!'

She raised her eyes to his with a look

that would have softened a stone, but the Baron lay there, stern as flinty rock.

This lasted for a moment, then he turned his eyes slowly upon her, a gloomy smile of contempt was on his face. From his mouth issued one word, sharp, cutting as a sword.

'Liar!' he hissed, through his closed teeth.

The wife shrank under this word as if touched by a red-hot iron. Her tears ceased, she threw her head back proudly, as if her whole being revolted from this cruel affront. Her lips trembled, her pale countenance was crimsoned with a deep blush, then turned again to a ghastly white. She rose from her knees, and drew herself upright.

'You are mistaken, Rudolph,' she said, in a peculiar deep tone of voice, fixing her eyes reproachfully and yet so sorrowfully upon the sick man. 'I am not a liar. I was only cowardly, faint-hearted. I have concealed something from you—I have been silent when I should have spoken. I am punished for it — fearfully, terribly punished!

'Know this then——

'That poor dying man in there . . . . is Constantine . . . . my first husband!'

The Baron started. For a moment the husband and wife gazed into each other's eyes.

What a world of thought, what a flood of unspoken questions and answers

was contained in that short span of time!

Then the young wife gave a deep sigh, and, with a heavy fall, sank fainting to the ground.

The Baron fell back, while a flush suffused his countenance and a light gleamed in his eye.

'Good God!' he exclaimed.

I called for help. The scales fell from my eyes; my heart bounded with delight. Her first husband! And I had not recognised him, had not once imagined it. But that handsome cavalier whom I remembered, and this woe-begone invalid—could they be the same person?

Her first husband! Now all was clear to me.

The mystery was solved!

There, Constantine von Gleichen—here, the Baron von Maszmann!

Poor Mélanie—poor, poor wife!

CHAPTER III.

THE PRINCESS'S VISIT.

'And a heart at leisure from itself
To soothe and sympathise.'

CHAPTER III.

THE PRINCESS'S VISIT.

THE Baroness was confined to her bed. The scenes of emotion, the night watchings, the anxiety and the shame, had been too much for her bodily powers; she had sunk under them. The Doctor feared that a brain fever was impending. The heavily-taxed frame needed the greatest care.

The President of police had, as the reader has already learnt, stationed two

officers in the house on guard, and he now let them remain as a protection against intrusion. Only by special permission from himself could any one enter.

Again the ray of light had come to illumine the darkness, and again malevolent tongues had turned the good news into evil.

'A pretty tale, indeed! So the false-faced one has two husbands!' said malicious souls.

'Well! One can never tell what is concealed under a fair appearance! It is said that she was not even divorced from her first husband!'

So the spiteful chattered.

But there were others who were overwhelmed with remorse, having learnt too

late how hasty they had been in passing judgment upon the unfortunate.

Prince Paul returned from his hunting-lodge to his palace in town, and often spoke in the court circle of the sad affair that had so closely touched his heart. He let fall some very bitter remarks about Herr von Bücking, while he expressed his deep sympathy with the unhappy lady.

Several Russian gentlemen pledged themselves for the fact that the Baroness had, in all due form, been divorced from her first husband.

After the Prince had sent his adjutant, and the Princess her physician, to inquire for the Baron and his wife, many people left their cards.

But the most energetic and pertinacious to enter the lists for their reviled countrywoman were the Princess Algarucki and the Frau von Baniutin.

They threw down the gauntlet to all comers. No expression derogatory to the Baroness might be uttered in their presence. Indeed, Frau von Baniutin did not hesitate to install herself in our little house as nurse to the Baroness.

Yes—the little villa was transformed into a hospital—people spoke in whispers, and walked about on tiptoe. It seemed as if the angel of death hovered over it.

The pseudo Mr. Williams—the first husband of the Baroness, Constantine von Gleichen—lay in the same unconscious

state. The Baron was certainly a little better since he had known his wife to be less guilty than he had imagined; yet he still hovered on the brink of the grave; the slightest breath might extinguish the flickering flame of life.

The Baroness lay in the fearful delirium of fever, now frenzied to madness, now prostrate with utter exhaustion.

The Princess came daily several times to inquire after the invalids, to bring them some costly delicacy, and to ease her heart by a chat with me. Her visits were a great comfort to me.

I had an old, low easy-chair in my not very luxurious apartment. In this she would place herself, when she came to see us, as near as possible to the stove. Olga

Petrowna was always very chilly. 'I am a little cold, Nicolas,' she would say; 'it is a result of my way of living.' Indeed, lying in bed until five o'clock was enough to bring any one into bad habits.

When I had settled her comfortably in her chair, with a footstool for her feet, and wrapped her in her sable cloak, made after the Russian style, as light as a feather and as warm as a down bed, she would sit for some time with half-closed eyes, while I, seated opposite to her, waited impatiently till she should speak.

'You see, Nicolas, that I was right,' she began at length. 'You were not then fully convinced, my friend, you were silent — silence is unanswerable. One should not be over-hasty in passing

judgment . . . I am no saint . . . I——' shaking her head, she said in a low voice: 'God pardon me! You cannot tell, Nicolas, how I have been situated in my life . . . let us not talk of the past. Ah! how sad was the old style of education! You know, Nicolas. Governesses who robbed! Tutors who drank, or did worse! My father was a grand seigneur, and had no time to trouble himself about me . . . my mother was dead. . . . Afterwards my husband . . . well! never mind about him.'

The old lady here secretly pressed the cross which she wore under her mantle, according to the Russian custom; she lay back again with closed eyes, as if to shut out those sad pictures of the past.

'But believe me, Nicolas,' she continued energetically, 'you men are wrong when you do not trust in woman's honour—you do yourselves harm—you rob yourselves of faith.

'And what are you, then, that you should judge us? Mere tyrants!

'But I must not excite myself.

'Listen, Nicolas; there are women who are endowed with principle, with purity of heart, who would rather suffer the most frightful torments than deviate from a path of rectitude. They are to be found everywhere in our country, and especially here in Germany, where education and religious feeling, perhaps also the coldness of their nature, comes to their aid. These are one class. But there are others. Those who

are absorbed by a great passion, noble souls, fever-tossed, storm-tried, who live and breathe for love alone, and rush headlong into ruin.

'From pure souls, temptations rebound impotently, as the blunted arrow from the bright shield. Such a soul, passionate yet pure, is the Baroness. I saw it in her, she had that fated look. From the first day I received her into my heart . . . a suffering sister. . . .

'It is a fearful position,' she continued, mysteriously, after a pause. 'Poor Mélanie! How I pity her . . . two husbands . . . one whom she loves, and the other . . . the Baron. . . .

'And perhaps to-morrow . . .'

She was suddenly silent.

There was silence for some time in the room.

'You have never heard, Nicolas, why she was separated from her first husband?' asked the Princess.

'Never,' I replied.

'The people here relate various tales—the wicked wretches!' She shook her hand so energetically that the rings sparkled and rattled on her slender fingers.

'If I had anything to do with their future, I would give them a spoonful of pitch and sulphur for every one of their wicked lies.'

I could not help smiling at her eagerness.

There were again some moments of

silence, till a new idea struck her, and, raising herself from her half-recumbent position, she suddenly began:

'Nicolas, you must do me a favour.'

I made a slight inclination, and looked at her expectantly.

'I should like to see *him* once—the first one—you understand. I do not wish him or the others to see me. You can easily manage it?'

'Nothing is more simple, your Highness. I will just go across and see if he is asleep, and the coast clear.'

I went to the other room. Herr von Gleichen lay in the same unconscious condition, with closed eyes. I hastened back to the Princess; I gave her my arm, and led her across the passage to the sick-

room. At the door she stood still, with head bent forward, and looked in.

I stepped to the window and drew the curtains back a little, so that the light fell full upon the countenance of the sick man; then, letting it fall, I returned to the door on tiptoe.

'A worn face—a martyr's head,' said the Princess, with much emotion. 'Good heavens!—and therefore all this trouble,' she continued briskly, turning her large eyes expressively upon me. 'Oh, this wicked world!

'Thank you, Nicolas; I beg you now to call Tatiana to lead me downstairs—you must not trouble yourself.

'*À propos*, have you good news of Hélène?'

'Thank you, she is quite well.'

'Give her my love, the darling, and also to your mother.'

Tatiana stood ready, and gave her arm to the Princess.

'*Au revoir, mon ami*,' she called back, as she was descending—'Oh, this wicked world!'

Another day she came and brought Nina with her. The child could no longer be restrained, she longed after her mother. She believed that she was dead, and that they concealed it from her. She was determined to see her mother; they might say what they liked, she would see her. The Princess had at last yielded, as soon as Nina promised to be reasonable.

It was a touching sight.

The little creature stood at the door of the sick-room, with the tears rolling down her cheeks, and her little mouth murmured softly:

'Mamma, dear mamma.'

We let her alone. She entered on tiptoe, and drew nearer and nearer to the bed, until she could reach her mother's hand; she eagerly grasped it, bent her face over it, and moistened it with tears and kisses.

CHAPTER IV.

THE BARON'S STORY.

'She never told her love,
But let concealment, like a worm i' the bud,
Feed on her damask cheek.'

CHAPTER IV.

THE BARON'S STORY.

THE Baroness recovered. It was as if some inward feeling came to nature's assistance. Perhaps it was the longing to behold once more that pale countenance, to be able once more to minister to his wants.

When she came to herself, he was her first thought, her first care; she forgot her husband, and even her child.

How passionately she must love him!

How strange that she had ever been willing to be separated from him!

Her first husband!—And Nina was his child—he was her father.

Years ago husband and wife had been divided, and now had found each other again. Was it chance? No—Heaven had brought them together again. She met him again, a shadow of his former self, and seemed only to have recovered him in order to lose him—to lose both him and the other—cruel, inexplicable fate!

Inexhaustible but sorrowful material was thus provided for the long daily conversations between the Princess and myself. We exhausted ourselves in conjectures, we lost ourselves in suppositions, and always came at last, like thousands of

others, to the one conclusion; that the ways of God are mysterious and incomprehensible.

'All discord, harmony not understood;
All partial evil, universal good.'

However dark may be the path by which a Higher Hand leads us, still, all that happens to us is for our good; all suffering leads to God.

Where human understanding ceases, we must bow in humility before His Almighty Power, seeking only to do His will.

I have already mentioned, that since the discovery, since he had known that the stranger was his wife's first husband, an alteration had taken place in the Baron. That gloomy, threatening look had passed

from his brow; his features had now lost their rigid expression; melancholy sadness only was stamped upon his countenance. He had never been very communicative, he was rather taciturn, and now he had become more so; nevertheless, it seemed to me, when I occasionally sat by his couch and read to him, or occupied myself in little offices for his comfort, as if he wished to say something, as if he felt impelled to unburden his heart to me. Words often hovered on his lips, but he repressed them again and again.

Since his wife had left her room, she frequently came to see him, but he said little to her. He held her hand in his, gazing at her, and murmuring now and then: 'Poor Mélanie—poor wife!'

One morning, when I came to his room, he raised himself, and asked me what day it was.

I told him it was Sunday. The bells were ringing for church.

He listened to them for some time in silence, and then said with an effort: 'Draw back the curtains.'

I did as he requested—the cold rays of the winter sun poured into the room. He folded his hands, shut his eyes, and lay there for a long time as if dead.

'I have had a dream, dear friend,' he said at last, raising himself. 'I dreamt I was in heaven. I cannot tell you my dream, it is too long, and speech is so painful to me; there is something here,' laying his hand with a pitiful movement

upon his chest, 'that cuts me like a knife.

'I must see the child, Bagdanoff,' he continued, after a pause, in a gentle voice; 'ask my wife to send Nina to me.'

He laid his head back again with a deep sigh, and closed his eyes; the exertion had been too much for his wounded lung.

I went across to Frau von Baniutin, and communicated to her the Baron's wish, of which she informed the Baroness.

Nina went to his room, and soon after he sent for the Doctor and myself. The child sat upon the bed, her little rosy fingers playing with his large hands; she was chattering gaily.

'Papa, you must get quite well now, and

have me with you again; I love you and mamma so very much.'

When we entered, she ceased her prattle. The Baron beckoned us to approach, and made an attempt to raise himself.

'Go away now, darling, to your mamma, he said, following the child with his eyes as she left the room.

Then he turned to us. 'I have a favour to ask of you, gentlemen,' he said. 'Before I die, I wish to make my will, and you to witness it. Give me writing materials.'

I handed him what he wanted, and for some time nothing was heard but the scratching of the pen as it moved to and fro across the paper.

He then looked over what he had written, altering a word here and there, and handed the paper to me.

'Read it, Bagdanoff!'

I read:

'This is my last will and testament. The one dated March 7th, 18—, which is deposited at Riga, I hereby revoke. I depose:

'1. That the children of my deceased sister receive Zamezieskо, together with the manors attached, and twenty thousand roubles each, in cash, from my personal effects.

'2. I bequeath to my cousin George von Prebenthof ten thousand silver roubles, in token of my esteem for him.

'3. I appoint as my sole heiress, my step-daughter Nina, Baroness von Gleichen, daughter of my beloved wife Mélanie, born of her first marriage with the Baron Constantine von Gleichen. All my landed property, and the remainder of my personal estate, she will receive without any limitation whatever.

'Should my sister's children dispute this disposal of my property, they will forfeit their share of the same.

'As long as my step-daughter remains a minor, or until she marries, my beloved wife will receive the revenues of my possessions, without being obliged to render any account thereof to any one.

'This I have written with my own hand, in full possession of my faculties, in

the presence of two witnesses, whose names are hereunto attached.'

While I was slowly reading this document the Baron still lay there with folded hands, gazing up towards heaven. The sun illumined his countenance, surrounding it almost with a halo.

The sight quite melted my heart.

'Thank you, gentlemen,' he said languidly, as we affixed our names to the document.

On the evening of the next day I was sitting again by his bed. I had just bandaged his wound, and given him his food, for he was as helpless as a child now. I had set the lamp on one side, that the light might not fall upon his face, and he

lay quite still, while I tried to divert his thoughts by a little conversation.

Suddenly he interrupted me.

'Nicolas,' he said, 'I wish to tell you something,' with a voice full of emotion. 'You are a true man,' he continued, 'I must pour out my heart to you before I die, you friend in need.'

'Oh, do not say that,' I implored.

'Since that time, since that dream, I have known for certain that I should die. I shall go away from here—it is best so . . . . I shall make room,' he said, with a deep sigh.

Deep melancholy lay upon my soul as he spoke thus.

His voice was faint and trembling, as,

frequently interrupting himself, and striving for breath, he continued:

'You know, Bagdanoff . . . . I was her father's friend . . . . even a little older than he. We were schoolfellows—neighbours. At that time . . . . Mélanie was still a child . . . . about as big as the little Nina. Her mother died early . . . . a beautiful woman—a Pole. You know . . . . not bad-hearted, but swayed by impulse . . . . knowing little of domestic love or principle . . . . a true child of the world. Soon after her father died . . . . his grief at the loss of his wife was so excessive that he could not overcome it. He caught cold out hunting . . . . in a week he was gone.

'It was a great misfortune! The child,

Mélanie, came to her relations, Poles. She had property on her mother's side, and the Brinskis immediately seized upon the guardianship. Her father had arranged nothing as to her future—she lived near Kowno.

'I did not see her again for some years .... in the meanwhile she had married —had been separated from her husband— and, with her child, was again living with her relations.

'There again I saw her. I received a letter, Nicolas .... a letter in an unknown hand .... it was from her .... the daughter of my old friend. She wanted my advice, begged for assistance .... how could I refuse it?

'It was a sad story, Nicolas; much

mischief had been done. Her relations had tried with all their might to hinder her marriage with Herr von Gleichen . . . . only with the greatest energy had she been able to accomplish it. Now, since her divorce, they had tried to force her into a marriage with one of their own family—a ruined man.

'When this failed they seized her property . . . . the property of her child, defrauded her . . . . robbed her. Intriguing and scheming spread their nets round her.

'Poor child! . . . . She had found them out too late . . . . her innocent mind could not understand it . . . . but now her eyes were opened. They were perpetually urging her to give money . . .

to sign mortgages, worthless as the paper on which they were written.

'Then in her trouble she remembered me . . . . she called me . . . . and I came.'

'Poor lady!' I exclaimed, with much feeling.

'It was scarce conceivable, Bagdanoff. Her relations robbed this poor, helpless, deeply-afflicted woman right and left. This had gone on for several years . . . . till her large property was quite gone—scattered to the four winds of heaven . . . herself—her child—beggars.

'I thought it over anxiously. I begged her, first of all, to withdraw herself from their influence . . . . to change her place of abode . . . . to show a firm will. She

did so . . . . and moved to Mitau, entrusting to me the management of her affairs.

'I did what I could to the best of my power. But, you know . . . . Bagdanoff . . . . you know well our sad position at home . . . . Alas! alas! corruption everywhere . . . . difficulties at every step. The relations condescended to means, fought with weapons, that an honourable man would despise.'

I nodded assent.

'I also know something of that,' I murmured involuntarily, and thought of many things that had come under my notice in my official position, scarcely conceivable. In Russia a man must have a handful of gold to obtain his rights. *Il*

prend is stamped upon every official face.

The Baron took a draught of lemonade, and continued:

'I undertook the trusteeship, but Kiseneff, who was at the head of affairs at that time, was heart and soul with the relations, the grasping Brinskis. Instead of helping me . . . . he put things into worse confusion . . . . the villain . . . . and because I would not understand his intimations to give him money, he caused endless difficulty.

'He tried to set up the first guardian, a cousin of Mélanie's, a thorough scoundrel; and when I went to law with him, he made false reports and brought false witnesses—it was like running one's

head against a stone wall—a dirty business.'

The Baron breathed painfully, and closed his eyes for a moment.

'I saw it all . . . the whole infamy . . . I was obliged to make it plain to Mélanie . . . it was a duty I owed to her and her child . . . I had loved her father, and for his sake I had been ready to help her.

'But now, when I began to know her, I did it for her own sake—for herself alone. She was a true woman, a noble soul, Nicolas—spotless as virgin snow—a great sorrow lay upon her heart—anxieties and troubles surrounded her. To lighten her burden, and to assure her future and that of her child, there is in our land but one

way . . . you know it, Nicolas . . . marriage.

'I proposed it to her . . . the very idea filled her with horror.

'But the family troubles increased. Her relations lost all sense of decency—they seized her estates, appropriated the revenues, and would not give her a farthing to support herself and her child.

'I hastened to the governor, applied to the courts . . . demanded justice for her . . . and punishment for the evil-doers. All was in vain.

'And now for the first time, a means of protection and happiness for her occurred to me.'

He sighed very deeply.

'Heaven is my witness—how pure and

true was my design! I reasoned with myself thus: Her heart is still filled with one image . . . he whom she loves is lost to her . . . as if he were dead . . . she will not marry again . . . and yet it is the only way to help her. Only her husband, according to our laws, can render her effectual assistance . . . can save her property for herself and her child.

'Like an inspiration the idea came upon me . . . why should not I, her father's friend . . . an old man . . . offer her my hand? Without the pretensions of a husband . . . to be her guardian . . . her adviser . . . her friend? It was the only way . . . I pointed it out to her . . . and at last she consented.

'I became her husband . . . she came

to me with her child, Nina. I sheltered them . . . they beautified the evening of my life . . . she and the little one.'

The invalid again sighed deeply.

'Ah, Nicolas! I have kept back something. During the whole five years of our married life, I was only her fatherly friend . . . nothing more. I imagined then—that my heart was too old—like a fountain that is dried up with years. I thought . . . at my age, I was dead to all that . . . there seemed to be no risk . . . greybeard that I was.

'But I was mistaken, Bagdanoff, grievously mistaken.

'This wife of mine, Mélanie! . . . laugh if you will . . . I loved her to folly! . . . I would have given my life for her . .

would have shed the last drop of my blood for one look of love from her! Yes—laugh if you will, Bagdanoff!

'I was no silly coxcomb . . . a grave, serious man . . . I should never have thought it possible . . . but it came . . . slowly . . . by degrees.

'The fabric of my reason fell like a pack of cards . . . I idolised her . . . loved her with a consuming passion . . . and was silent!

'She imagined nothing of all this . . . No . . . I was calm outwardly. I dared not terrify her, Nicolas! . . . and I succeeded. She knew nothing of the tumult that raged in my breast . . . no man knows it . . . you are the first . . . and the only one.

'Five long years! . . . Ah, my friend!

'It did not come all at once . . . very gradually . . . I was an old man, a bachelor, unused to women. It was a sacrifice to me, as well as to herself . . . my habits . . . peculiarities . . . you understand.

'But soon . . . when my eyes followed her . . . in the house, in the park . . . everywhere . . . that glorious countenance . . . that lovely form . . . that sweet disposition . . . and with it all the heavy burden of sorrow on her heart!

'When I came to see, how wise, how noble, how pure and modest she was . . . when I came to know her charm, the goodness of her heart . . . then, Nicolas, then it came home to me . . . that until

now I had lived in vain . . . that there was one treasure in this world for which I had forgotten to seek. I cursed my obstinate folly, which had kept me back from having wife and child while I was still in the vigour of my youth . . . and yet . . . at the same time . . . I blessed my fate, which had brought me such a treasure even at the close of my life.

'But ah! The gold in my hand soon began to burn me . . . I suffered the torments of Tantalus . . . I had thought, as I said, that my heart was quite dead . . . that the spring of my affections was dried up . . . and now . . . I was starving with a full cup . . . I thirsted . . . I panted . . . daily . . . hourly . . . with ever-increasing torment! O God!'

He groaned painfully, and shut his eyes again. Much speaking, added to the excitement, caused me to fear the worst. Nevertheless, I could understand that it had become a deep, an inevitable necessity to this man to relieve his heart by speaking to some one. I therefore sat quite still, without moving.

He began again, almost in a whisper, with many interruptions from weakness.

'I was attacked by a painful malady, rheumatism, and came here for relief. At home we lived alone . . . here we were drawn into the vortex of society. Mélanie became distinguished . . . celebrated . . . I saw how they all paid court to her . . . how they attempted to approach her . . . young men . . . of high position . . . in-

tellectual, handsome . . . all paid her homage. I felt no fear . . . no envy or jealousy . . . I knew Mélanie's heart . . . I would have sworn by her honour as by my own. Let them buzz around her if they liked . . . one look from her . . . and I was easy. No . . . that was not it.

'But one day . . . I noticed an alteration in herself. She was pale . . . absent . . . confused. The sight of me seemed to terrify her . . . she often burst into tears . . . I questioned her . . . she avoided me . . . I pressed her more urgently . . . in vain.

'At last I became anxious. What was it that she was concealing from me? It seemed as if demons had taken possession of her . . . even the child was neglected.

Then came those venomous tongues . . . again and again . . . I would not listen . . . Mélanie untrue! . . . Mélanie a faithless wife! . . . It was inconceivable!

'I drove back the thought—but—but . . . . I began to study her . . . . my looks followed her . . . . I became a prey to suspicion . . . . I suffered agonies . . . my honour! Jealousy seized upon my heart with its greedy talons . . . . and then those rancorous tongues!

'At last I was weak enough to follow her . . . . secretly . . . . once, twice—for a week together . . . . spies told me when she was with him . . . . I was obliged to believe it. . . . I listened to the suggestions of that serpent. . . . I

went there . . . . I entered—the weapon in my hand.

'Would to God I had been deceived!

'But no . . . . there he lay, pale as death, with wide open eyes . . . . and she herself . . . . sat by his bedside reading to him. The light of the lamp shone upon them both. I saw it . . . . saw them shrink in terror.

'Then I turned giddy . . . . a heavy weight seemed to press upon me . . . . the pistol fell from my hand . . . . a report . . . . a stinging pain . . . . I sank to the earth. I remember no more!'

'Oh, horrible! most horrible!'

His countenance had become flushed as his agitation and excitement increased;

and now, when he had finished, he passed his hand hastily over his mouth. His lips were dyed with that blood-stained foam. He sighed painfully, and sank back as if lifeless.

At this moment his wife entered the room.

'He sleeps,' I said softly; and as I gazed at her, I thought to myself: 'Ah, if you could know all that I have heard!' I took her hand and led her gently away. I feared he would awake and betray himself.

I took her across to Frau von Baniutin, and then returned to the Baron.

He lay quite still, as if in profound sleep.

'God be praised!' I said, with thankful heart, 'that he has removed the burden

from his soul. The rest will do him good —he sleeps.'

Ah! I little knew that this sleep was the sleep of death.

CHAPTER V.

THE BARON'S DEATH.

'How calm his exit;
Night-dews fall not more gently.'

CHAPTER V

THE BARON'S DEATH.

AFTER all, I received the intelligence of the Baron's death by letter, notwithstanding that I had nursed him the whole time, and had heard the last words from his lips, that agonising confession.

My mother and my two sisters had been at Pau since October. She was a great sufferer from an obstinate affection of the throat, and from weak nerves. I had been in constant anxiety about her during the

whole time. Just after the fearful tragedy which had shut me up in the villa in Garden Road, I received a letter from my eldest sister, Hertha, informing me that the doctor in Pau had ordered them to remove to Nice, as the climate of the Riviera did not suit my mother.

This intelligence caused me much anxiety. A change now, in the middle of winter, and a long journey, would quite exhaust my mother. And then I knew too well the cruel foresight of many physicians practising at watering-places. As soon as they think their patient's condition hopeless, they shake them off under any pretext, that they may go and die elsewhere.

I was just in the frame of mind to look

on the dark side of everything. This is not strange, considering all that had happened, and my present surroundings, which would give colour to my thoughts.

That evening, when I entered my room on leaving the Baroness, I found a letter lying on the table. I recognised Hertha's handwriting, and hastily seized it, with a foreboding of evil.

My anxiety almost overcame me as I tore it open and read. My presentiment had not deceived me. My mother was very ill, almost hopeless, and urgently desired to see me. I was overcome with grief.

My poor, good mother!

I could be spared now; the Baron would miss me, but I was not indispensable.

My poor mother! She was ill in that far-off country, she who loved me so much.

I ran to the Doctor; I wrote a line to the President and the Princess. I hastily packed my things, threw my portmanteau into the carriage, caught the first train, and rushed on into the dark stormy winter's night.

I was alone in the *coupé*, wrapped up in my fur, with dark, gloomy thoughts in my soul, harmonising with the night of darkness and storm. Sorrow everywhere! From whence I came, and whither I was going!

One single star alone gleamed through the darkness; Hélène's lovely image arose and comforted me. Oh that the futur

might bring happiness, that a clear morning might break after this gloomy night!

At last I sought relief from these thoughts in sleep. I passed through Strasbourg without knowing it, so sound was my slumber after so many night-watches. The first pale streak of grey appeared in the horizon as we approached Mulhausen, where I took rail to Lyons, *viâ* Belfort.

The Jura had assumed its winter mantle of deep snow, looking dazzlingly white in the frosty air; but when we had left it behind and were nearing the Rhone, the influence of the southern climate was quickly manifest.

Without stopping, I hurried on through Lyons and Marseilles to Nice; anxiety

was the whip which urged me onward.

Four days after my arrival at Nice—during which time, thank God, my mother had passed a crisis for the better—I was horrified to see in a newspaper the announcement of the Baron's death. I was sitting in the reading-room of the hotel when the recent journals were brought in. I took one from North Germany and read it. When I had finished I was about to lay it down, when, amongst the advertisements, I caught sight of a name which immediately riveted my attention; it was Mélanie, Baroness von Maszmann. With a choking sensation I read the following:

'After much suffering, my dear husband died this evening, gently and painlessly.

'MÉLANIE,

'BARONESS VON MASZMANN.'

I looked at the date. The Baron had died the very evening I left. The exertion of his confession to me had, perhaps, been the cause of his death.

Deeply shocked, I left the room. A thousand melancholy thoughts crowded into my mind. I wished to be alone.

A day or two after, the usual formal announcement arrived from W——, and a little later a letter from my good friend Princess Algarucki. Only the postscript was written in her own hand; it was

original, and I therefore transcribe it here:

'His sufferings are over. He has run his course . . . it is now well with him He was eight-and-sixty and a half year over—a good age.'

En parenthèse, the Princess was almost as old, but she felt herself still quite young, in fact immortal.

'He is dead, and it is good so—you know that, Nicolas? One of my governesses (she was a nasty woman with a particular affection for drink) used frequently to tell me a story about Alexander the Great — how with a sword he cut

asunder the Gordian Knot. *Eh bien!* that pistol-shot has loosened a knot here. Dear Mélanie! She is all at once freed from her embarrassment, for it is certain she is infatuated about the other one. I pity her very much . . . she takes it very much to heart about the poor Baron, her husband. She is very miserable, Nicolas; but only think—the "other one" is recovering. What will happen now? God only knows!

'Always your true

'OLGA PETROWNA.

'P.S.—Send me an answer quickly, and tell me about your mother. I miss you very much.'

From the letter itself I learnt the follow-

ing: Frau von Baniutin had gone into the room about half an hour after I left, and found the Baron in a quiet slumber. She returned to the Baroness, and said to her:

'God be praised, he is sleeping like a child.'

When she entered the room again (I was then well on my journey) to take away the lamp and kindle the night-light, the Baron lay as still as before, in the same position.

Not wishing to wake him, she stepped towards the bed to see that everything was in order. She perceived with horror that his countenance had quite altered—the features were rigid, the nose sharp. She bent down and listened, there was no

sound of breathing. She touched his hands, they were already cold.

The Baron was dead.

He had died of internal hemorrhage.

CHAPTER VI.

RE-UNITED.

'Marriage, rightly understood,
Gives to the tender and the good
A little heaven below.'

CHAPTER VI.

RE-UNITED.

Two years passed away.

Towards the end of September 18—, I was travelling in Italy with my bride. I was taking Hélène to the south for our bridal trip, and to introduce her to my mother, who was passing the winter at Florence.

I had been married two months, and was now enjoying the happiness of love fulfilled——Hélène was an angel of beauty and goodness.

It was a glorious autumn, the air was pure and balmy, the heat not overpowering; refreshing showers during the last few weeks had revived the vegetation, which had been parched by the summer sun, and it was now bursting forth with renewed vigour. The freshness and verdure was like spring.

One afternoon we were going to Certosa.

My sisters were to have accompanied us, but at the last moment, when the carriage was at the door, they were detained by some friends.

I must confess I was not very much vexed at this; I liked best being with my wife alone—we were still in our honeymoon.

We drove out through the Porta Romana in an open carriage, and soon left the noisy

town behind us. In front rose the gently-sloping heights, leading upwards to the Apennines. Clothed with wood, dotted with country houses, they towered one above the other as far as the eye could reach.

We drove through the suburbs, between rows of decayed-looking houses, ornamented like palaces on the exterior, but bare and inhospitable within. Long lines of dusty carriages stood before them, harnessed with horses, mules and asses, mixed together. Before the gates, in the shadow of the houses, sat half-naked children with dark hair and large eyes, and near them chatted groups of girls, in gay light dresses, engaged in plaiting

Slowly we crawled up the steep road, while the vetturino on his box flicked the flies with his whip and chewed the stalk of a rose. We reached the top of the hill, and our horses trotted gaily on upon the level ground. Our road lay between thick hedges of vines and mulberry trees; over their green walls, on the right, towered the church of St. Gaggio. Before us lay the mountains, which seemed to rise higher and higher in lines of wonderful beauty, from the richest green to the softest hues of grey and violet.

We rolled on through the village of Galluzzo. Crowds of beggars accosted us, all more or less afflicted.

'*Un soldo, signor—un soldo, bellissima signora!*' they cried, coming up close to

the carriage, and following pertinaciously till we gave them their tribute.

Behind Galluzzo we passed over the Ema, and at the junction of this river with the Greve, another rapid mountain stream, on a little hill covered with olives and cypresses, rose before us, like a mediæval fortress, the monastery, the Certosa di Val d'Ema.

We stopped before a grated iron door, surrounded by the usual crowd of beggars, till a porter came and opened to us; then we went on up the steep narrow path, between mulberry plantations, till we arrived in the cool outer court of the monastery, where we left our carriage.

One of the monks, clad in a long white robe, came and offered himself as our

guide; he had a grave and kindly face, not showing much intellectual power—a Sicilian by birth, as he informed us.

Conducted by him we ascended to the gallery, bordered on one side by arched windows, which afforded a good view of the magnificent landscape. The valley of the Arno, Florence, and the range of the Apennines as far as Pistoja lay before us.

'At this monastery they made world-renowned essences, especially the extract of violets, and liqueurs. Hélène made her purchases, and sipped a little glass of the oily, gold-coloured fluid; and when she had finished we continued our way through long, cold passages, across to the cathedral.

Almost dazzled by the splendour of the interior of this magnificent building, we were glad to step out into the court, a wide, empty space surrounded by a piazza. In the middle was a well, with an ancient copper bucket, and close by stood a fan palm—a solitary child of the south.

In a corner were two small iron crosses. The monk told us that these marked the burying-place of the two last departed brothers of the monastery. No stone, no inscription told who they were.

'Ashes to ashes—dust to dust!'

'We are only twenty-three here now,' said the monk, 'and most of us quite aged.'

An expression of anxious thought came

over the countenance of my sweet young wife. I took her by the arm and led her gently away.

In one of the passages we saw something white glimmer between the pillars; another monk was coming slowly towards us, followed by a lady and gentleman.

'See! strangers like ourselves,' I said to Hélène.

She looked at them with indifference; then suddenly her expression changed to one of astonishment and delight.

'Oh, look, look, Nicolas!' she cried quickly.

'Well, what is the matter?'

'It is Mélanie—Frau von Maszmann—what a happy chance!'

She left me, and ran forwards towards

the new-comers in her lively, warm-hearted manner.

My heart beat with emotion—Mélanie here!

I followed in much agitation.

I saw a tall, somewhat haggard man, with a long black beard, conducting a lady. She was rather pale, but stately and very beautiful. She looked up.

Yes—it was indeed Mélanie.

By this time she had recognised us, and hastened towards us smiling, with a flush of surprise on her cheeks.

'Hélène Bagdanoff!' she cried, 'and you, my true friend—do I see you again? What happiness!'

'Gracious lady,' I stammered, kissing her hand.

We were both much agitated. She had tears in her eyes as she turned to her husband.

'This is Nicolas, Constantine, Herr Councillor Bagdanoff, to whom we both owe so large a debt of gratitude.

She then threw her arms round Hélène and kissed her affectionately on both cheeks. I stood opposite to the stranger, Herr von Gleichen; we gazed steadfastly at each other. When I saw him last, on that evening when the hasty summons called me away from the villa in Garden Road, he was pale and wan, in the grasp of death, one who had apparently done with life.

To-day, after nearly two years, I met him once more. The seemingly dead had

risen again, had been restored to life; a handsome, stately man, with grave but kindly features.

I could trace in those noble features some resemblance to the pseudo Mr. Williams, whom I had seen pining with mortal sickness; but I could scarcely realise that he and this noble gentleman, who now with heartfelt cordiality grasped both my hands in his, were one and the same person.

The thick beard, indeed, was a little mixed with grey, and the hair on the temples had begun to recede, but no one would have taken him to be at the most more than five-and-thirty, his eyes looked even younger.

The greetings on both sides were very

hearty. Then we walked in three couples up and down the cool cloistered passages, the two white-robed monks, Mélanie with Hélène, Herr von Gleichen and myself, in eager conversation.

How much there was to tell!

Those two, whom fate had so strangely brought together at that time in W——, who had passed such hours of agony there, were once more united; they had at last, after heavy trials, found that happiness which the spring of their lives had not given them. They had now learnt this: To live to be happy.

In truth, my old friend the Princess had said rightly, 'That pistol-shot has cut the Gordian knot!'

And the Baron! How truly had he

felt in his last hours—he must make room —he was one too many in the world!

Melancholy, overpowering thought!

With what wonderful power does a Higher Hand guide the fate of mankind.

At sunset we returned home in the same carriage. I sat opposite Frau von Gleichen. She was more beautiful, more charming than ever. But still there lay a shade of melancholy upon her lovely features, like a cloud upon the bright landscape. As the stern grandeur of the storm-cloud is illumined by the beauty of the sunshine, so shone upon her brow the sunny gleam of happiness, so spoke from her eyes the blessedness of perfect love.

Those whom man had divided, God had re-united.

I will tell you, kind reader, later on, how it all happened.

In our drive home I touched very cautiously upon the dark past, but we spoke much of the Princess; and to my great joy I learnt from Mélanie that she was expected in Florence during the next week. So, in a short time, I should again see my old friend.

She had written to me several times during these months of absence, and her last letter was dated from Franzensbad, where she was spending the summer with her sister. She had not then decided where to go for the winter. Unwearied wanderer!

I had learnt from her, in the preceding year, that Mélanie was with her first hus-

band again, and that they had visited her on their way through Berlin. She also informed me that they intended to reside on one of their estates in the neighbourhood of the Prussian capital.

'So they are again together,' she had concluded. 'I am glad for their own sakes, and especially on Nina's account, for it was miserable for the child. She was quite old enough to suffer under her mother's trouble. Well, they will now both of them keep the peace, for "burnt children dread the fire!"'

I thought of the good, excellent Baron, who now slumbered in his grave, whose pain was now stilled for ever. I was the

only one who knew his secret. Half unconsciously this passed through my mind as we approached the town, and even the joy of this reunion seemed touched with sadness.

But the wheels of our carriage were already rolling over the pavement; we were already driving down the long and narrow Via dei Serragli.

There lay the river, sparkling in the brilliancy of many lamps; upon the Lungarno thronged the multitude, enjoying the freshness of the evening breeze and the coolness of the water-side; crowds of people on foot and in carriages were in the busy streets.

We stopped before the Hôtel de Ville. At a window above appeared a dark curly

head. It was Nina, my darling. She uttered a cry of joy, then shot like an arrow down the steps and sprang into my arms.

CHAPTER VII.

THE PRINCESS AT FLORENCE.

'Among them, sweet friendship, we hail thee the best;
Thou shedd'st a glad halo of bliss round thy name;
'Mid sad scenes of sorrow, and grief, and unrest,
'Tis sunshine, illumined by thy holy name.'

CHAPTER VII.

THE PRINCESS AT FLORENCE.

AFTER this we saw each other daily. We were two couples in our honeymoon, and if I and Hélène acknowledged this with a certain *naïveté*, following the suggestions of our hearts, the others enjoyed it as a newly-regained gift from Heaven. They loved each other unspeakably, these two re-united ones, with a restrained glow and depth of affection which comes to but few mortals They were two ardent spirits,

noble souls, strangely endowed beings, and I hardly wondered that at one time, when experience of life was wanting, they should have made themselves just as unhappy as they were now blessed.

One evening we drove to the Via Colli, on the other side of the Arno, the most lovely of all drives, unparalleled in beauty. The valley of the Arno lay extended before us in the golden twilight of the fast darkening evening like a fairy tale—like a dream. I was quite absorbed in admiration of the scene.

Suddenly an open carriage crossed our way, and for a moment obscured my view. It was going, like ourselves, at a slow pace.

Hélène uttered a slight exclamation,

which was immediately re-echoed from the other carriage.

Two ladies sat in it—the Princess and her cousin, the lovely Countess d'Alois Micly.

I had scarcely time to stop the carriage when the Princess, hastily rising from her half-reclining position, cried out with joy :

'Nicolas Seminitsch Bagdanoff! Dear Mélanie!'

I sprang down and hastened towards her. The rays of the setting sun dazzled my eyes and somewhat obscured my vision. I murmured :

'Gracious Princess! — What a great happiness!—How well you look!—ever young and ever handsome!' I pressed my lips upon her perfumed glove.

'Flatterer . . . I am also very glad to see you again,' she said, and touched me on both cheeks.

She was an enchantress, this woman. During the two years that I had not seen her, she had become at least ten years younger, and did not look a day older than forty.

'I want to talk to you, Nicolas,' she whispered in my ear. 'I am staying with my cousin, the Countess d'Alois, Via Jacopo da Diaceta; come and see me alone to-morrow after mid-day.

'Dear Olga,' turning to her cousin, 'let me introduce Herr Councillor Bagdanoff, a very dear friend of mine, of whom I have already spoken to you. Nicolas — my cousin, Olga Nikolajewna.'

By-the-bye, she was really her niece!

After kindly greetings, at last we all drove home together to take tea with the Countess.

Punctually at noon on the following day I ascended the steps of the Princess's house, to pay my promised visit.

I was conducted to a comfortable boudoir, elegantly tapestried with crimson silk.

I found the Princess almost buried in a large fauteuil, wrapped in a Persian dressing-gown, while her small, beautiful feet peeped forth from the covering and rested upon a footstool. She was sitting, as usual, close to the stove, although now there was no fire in it.

'Ah, Nicolas,' she said, stretching out her hand to me to kiss, and giving me a

kind look from her eyes, 'I have not for a long time been so glad at anything as to have a regular good chat with you undisturbed. Sit down here by me—I can make myself quite at home in my cousin's house; she is very kind-hearted, and is a great beauty.'

As she spoke, my eye involuntarily glanced at a costly marble bust, which stood half in shadow, in a recess.

'Yes—just look at that; she *is* a beauty, Nicolas, and all the world is at her feet,' said the Princess, smiling; 'that statue caused great excitement in the Paris Exhibition.'

'Exquisite,' I murmured, in rapture.

'My cousin cannot even go across the street without being admired. These

Italians are a *galante* people—they have taste. "*Madre de Dios!—la bellissima Signora!*" are the exclamations that greet her when she shows herself. Well—she does not much mind it.

'You look well, my friend—marriage suits you wonderfully, and your wife is a lovely creature. You have made a good choice, like a sensible man.

'And Mélanie!

'But sit down, I want to talk to you about her.'

I drew a chair near her and sat down.

'I am as much interested as ever in that charming woman, Nicolas—I love her like my own daughter. I hope that she has at last reached her haven—is now happy. What do you think? Speak freely.'

'I do not *think* that she is happy—I am *certain* that her happiness is assured,' I answered warmly.

'I rejoice to hear you say so. Her husband!—I scarcely saw him yesterday, and I have his image always before me, with that wan countenance, that tangled hair.

'Well, listen:—when the other, the good Baron, was dead, this one appeared suddenly to revive. In a few weeks he had made such rapid steps towards recovery, that I felt obliged to speak to Mélanie on account of people's talk—you understand.

'She was quite intractable, determined not to leave him; and so I, old woman as I am, packed up my bundle, and, tearing myself reluctantly from my customary

mode of life, took up my abode in the little house in Garden Road.

'For the sake of appearances, you know, Nicolas.'

I nodded, smiling, and she continued:

'Well—after a slight relapse, the poor fellow improved daily; and however much Mélanie might grieve over the Baron, and the tragedy that had taken place, still, nature will be nature. As *he* came back to life, bloom was restored to *her*.

'She would not leave him even for a day, and so I advised them to take a journey, as soon as he could bear removal. They travelled to Nice, and were there married very quietly. It was the only thing to be done, for separation would have broken both their hearts.

'Her husband is a handsome, stately man. I admire him much—an evident gentleman, a true nobleman, a man of honour—worthy even of her.

'It still remains to me an inexplicable mystery, Nicolas, how these two, made for each other, were ever separated,' continued the Princess, after a pause, looking thoughtfully at me.

'It must have been something very special, like a thunderbolt, that cleaves the rocks asunder. It is quite incredible, after all that one has seen.'

'Nothing extraordinary, I believe, Olga Petrowna,' I answered gravely. 'It was excess of love.'

The Princess sat upright, and gazed at me incredulously.

'What do you mean? What do you know about it? Tell me, Nicolas.'

'Excess of love,' I answered with emphasis. 'But I will relate the story to your Highness. I have learnt it all since that dreadful time, partly from others during my residence in Courland, and partly from these two themselves during these last weeks of our re-union.'

'The solution of the mystery—I know it.'

The Princess leant slowly back again, her eyes fixed upon me in rapt attention.

'Listen,' I began.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE LOVE-MATCH.

'He meets, by heavenly chance express,
The destined maid.'

CHAPTER VIII.

THE LOVE-MATCH.

'HERR VON MENGHDEN, the father of the Baroness, was one of the most perfect gentlemen of his time.

'You must certainly have heard of him, Princess; he often came to St. Petersburg, but of course it was before my time.'

Olga Petrowna nodded her head somewhat irritably.

'I knew him years ago, Nicolas; he was

a tall, handsome man—rather a libertine as they said.'

'Manly beauty, it seems, is hereditary in the Menghden family, but Mélanie's father added to this the most polished and courteous address. He was very thoughtless, very imprudent, spending his capital, instead of living only upon the interest. Besides, he was a great admirer of the fair sex.'

The Princess threw her head back, and extended slightly her delicate nostrils. She had a strange expression in her eyes, gazing straight before her, as if she were absorbed in remembrances of the past.

'When he was thirty years old, Herr von Menghden was at Kowno, where he met, at a ball, Fräulein von Brinski. He

had never seen her before, but to look on her and lose his heart was the work of a moment.

'A Menghden seldom woos in vain, and they were married, in spite of all the hindrances the family threw in the way. The Brinskis were a crafty race: they had managed with great skill to steer their bark safely through the storms and revolutions of unhappy Poland. They gave ample assistance to patriots, revolutionists, but they did this in secret, without being discovered, and had thus remained untouched, while other families were utterly ruined, and sent to Siberia.

'The young Frau von Menghden was the heiress; the bulk of the family property was in her possession, and all this wealth

would be lost to them on her marriage. They moved heaven and earth to make her change her mind, but in vain.

'As soon as he was married, and in possession of so much wealth, her husband cast off his youthful follies. He devoted himself to his lovely, brilliant, pleasure-seeking wife, and to the management of his property.

'Their eldest child, a boy, died young, and there only remained to them a little daughter—Mélanie.

'The mother seems to have been an amiable but frivolous person, a true Pole, passionately devoted to pleasure of all kinds, and especially fond of dancing. They were well known in society, a handsome, brilliant couple; but the domestic

ménage was not very satisfactory—there were perpetual quarrels and reconciliations. You know the proverb, Olga Petrowna: "Pole and German—horse and ass!"

'Besides, she was capricious and jealous, even to frenzy. She died very young, not quite thirty years old. She quarrelled with her husband at a ball, came out of the heated room flushed with the dance, and stood outside in the bitter cold waiting for the carriage, just to defy him. She then drove home, two hours' journey, with only a light covering. The next morning she was taken ill, and eight days afterwards this lovely creature, a short time ago full of life and health, was carried to her grave.

'Her husband was utterly prostrated by

this blow; he never recovered from it. He raved in delirium like one insane; everything was forgotten, even the child. His only passion was the chase. For weeks together he wandered through wood and marsh, his gun upon his shoulder, seeking oblivion. One day, returning home after a long expedition, he was taken ill, and lay down and died, leaving no will behind him.

'The Brinskis immediately assumed the guardianship of the child, the heiress, who was about ten years old, and took her to live with them.

'Fortunately for the child, her governess, a Swiss, and a most excellent woman, who had brought her up from infancy, was allowed to remain with her and to complete her education.

'The family had already designed the young heiress for one of their own people, her young cousin, Thaddeus von Brinski—a good-tempered ne'er-do-well. People said that he had agreed to certain conditions in favour of the rest if he married her; it would indeed have been a shame to allow this splendid property to fall again into the hands of strangers.

'Cousin Thaddeus soon began to play the amiable to the blooming Mélanie, and the handsome, lively girl is said to have looked with no unfavourable eye upon her gallant relative. All things seemed progressing satisfactorily.

'But fate had a great disappointment in store for them.

'Mélanie had attained her eighteenth

year, when the Brinskis received a pressing invitation to Berlin from a near relative, Count Sowitzki, who begged them to honour his wedding with their presence. They gladly accepted, and at the beginning of the year they all went to the Prussian capital.

'Here Mélanie met, for the first time, Herr von Gleichen. As with her parents, so now with her, they loved at once!

'An amateur concert was to be given for a charitable purpose, under very high patronage. The young Fräulein von Menghden, a great enthusiast in music, and herself a brilliant performer on the piano-forte, begged her relations to take her to it. The concert took place in the Academy, and they sat in front of the

second circle. Before them were the ladies and gentlemen belonging to the court. Their presence distracted the young girl a little, so that the first pieces fell but coldly on her ear.

'Then a lady took her place at the piano, a brilliant blonde, with golden hair, and neck and arms of dazzling whiteness. A whisper ran through the salon, a murmur of applause, which was also partly due to another appearance.

'For at this moment a young nobleman, with his violoncello in his hand, stepped to the front, and, with a low bow, took his place. He was tall, somewhat pale, of slender figure, with dark hair, and dark mysterious eyes.

'Mélanie felt a strange thrill of emotion

at his appearance—she could not turn her eyes away from him.

'"Ah! Herr von Gleichen!" she heard one of the ladies in front whisper to her neighbour; "he plays exquisitely!"

'Mélanie looked at the programme. "Herr von Gleichen and Frau von Wense.' Meta von Wense, that was then the name of the brilliant beauty at the piano.

'A quick glance passed between the performers, and the duet began.

'Mélanie sat like one in a dream, a trance of ecstasy. The world, her surroundings, herself, were all forgotten. She had always been fond of the violoncello, it so much resembled the human voice; but what miserable bungling all previous performances had been!

'Oh, those tender, soul-stirring tones—they drew her very heart-strings. Tears stood in her eyes, a smile was on her lips. It seemed to her as if heaven were opened, and angels, descending, sang their sweet notes.

'When the piece was ended, and she came to herself, she felt the hot tears rolling down her cheeks, she pressed her hand upon her bosom, and endeavoured to still her emotion.

'When she became composed enough to look up, the gentleman with the violoncello had disappeared.

'Fortunately no one spoke to her immediately; she sat there for a time in a confused dream—she heard nothing but those melancholy sweet tones which the charmer

had drawn forth—she saw only those large melancholy eyes fixed upon her.

'"Constantine von Gleichen!" her lips murmured involuntarily.

'From that moment the plan of the Brinskis was overthrown. Cousin Thaddeus, who so gallantly wrapped her mantle round her and led her to the carriage, little thought that this one evening had lost him his rich bride.

'Fate had decreed, also, that this brilliant violoncellist should be attracted by the young maiden who listened with such rapture. Perhaps her lovely eyes had inspired him to do his best, for on that evening he had even surpassed himself. His heart was passionately agitated, and he already stood in the vestibule, behind a pillar, to

see once more that young stranger-lady, and to learn, if possible, who she was and where she lived.

'The fates were propitious.

'Cousin Thaddeus himself did him this kind service.

'"Hôtel Meinhard!" he called out to the coachman, loud enough for the listener behind the pillar to hear. The next day, at the noonday meal at Meinhard's hotel, Herr von Gleichen appeared at the *table d'hôte*, and again saw the young lady, looking quite as lovely in the clear light of day as the evening before in the glare of the concert-room.

'After that he came every day, and taking his place at a little distance from the object of his adoration, feasted himself in silence upon her looks. From the first

time his appearance had been noticed, and Mélanie's changing colour told him as plainly as words could do what was passing in her heart.

'The young people soon became acquainted with each other, and it was Cousin Thaddeus again who brought this about. With the courtesy of a gentleman and a Pole, he made advances to Herr von Gleichen, told him of the delight which he had given them all by his playing, drank champagne with him, and was profuse in his compliments. He did not fail to add that his cousin, Mélanie, was almost as perfect a performer upon the piano as he was upon the violin. Herr von Gleichen begged for an introduction soon, which was immediately effected.

'Everything followed in due course, quite naturally—visits, invitations, musical re-unions. These two ardent souls were soon drawn together: they discovered each other's feelings, and their hearts swore eternal love.

'Well, your Highness, of course there were many long faces when the young lady, as she considered it her duty to do, communicated to her relations the happy event.

'They stormed and raged, and hastily left Berlin. Thaddeus swore to cut the throat of the miserable violoncellist, or his own, if Mélanie took him. They tried by every means to prevent a marriage so disastrous to them; but as iron hardens under the strokes of the hammer, so their

love became firmer from the obstacles which were placed in its way.

'To make my story short, Mélanie gave up her claim to a certain territory named Mosciska, worth about a hundred thousand roubles, as they said, which she threw as a morsel to appease the hungry wolves in order to ransom herself. She also paid the debts of Cousin Thaddeus, who, by-the-bye, had neither cut his own nor the other's throat, but had soothed his injured feelings by indulging to excess in champagne and Rhenish wine.

'I tell your Highness this to give you a slight sketch of the family to which Mélanie belonged.'

'*Les grédins! les misérables!*' murmured the Princess, angrily.

I continued my story.

'In the spring of 18—, they were married. Their life was an intoxication of love—as it were one long kiss; they revelled in an earthly paradise. They were all in all to each other.

'They went for their bridal tour to the Tyrol; stayed first for some time in the neighbourhood of Innsbruck, and when this place became crowded in the summer, they retired farther up into the mountains. Amidst the grand solitude of nature's sublimity, they lived in a cottage, far from the roar of the world, alone with themselves and their love.

'One would have thought that, according to the law of nature, a reaction must follow, that their first transports would be mode-

rated. But it was not so. In these souls of fire sprang a fountain of love which was inexhaustible.

'But yet — there is something more dangerous than the relaxation of passion, than the gradual descent from heaven to earth, the returning consciousness that we are but mortals after all, and those wings which we have grown must shrink away from us, and we must again feel the earth under our feet.

'Their love assumed dimensions ever more critical; it was like a glowing fire, which must at last either consume them or wear itself out.

'All who were acquainted with Herr von Gleichen and his wife at that time were agreed that there could not have

Seen a more handsome, brilliant, happy couple than those two. The full sun of happiness seemed to smile on them. Young, beloved, handsome, rich (for Herr von Gleichen also possessed considerable property), courted and fêted in society, what more could life offer them? The horn of plenty had poured its fulness on their heads.

'But you know, Olga Petrowna, the old Russian proverb: "The devil has a finger in every pie!"

'As long as they were alone upon the mountains, far from the haunts of men, intoxicated with the first happiness of fulfilled love, the heaven of their union was unshadowed by a single cloud. The long walks through the arched glades of the

forest, arm linked in arm, lip pressed to lip; the pleasant meals; the sweet siestas, then the long blissful evenings in a little boat, these two alone rocking on the murmuring waves, on which the mountains cast their deep shadows, and the moonbeams lay like a golden bridge!

'But they returned home. They settled in Berlin. They were surrounded by the rush and roar of the world. Friends and acquaintances circled about them. The cup of happiness was dashed from their lips.

'Both were ardent natures, and the deep passions which lay within their souls could not be pent up. Each demanded of the other that they should be entirely one, that there should be no wish, no thought, no

feeling, which the other did not share—*l'excès de l'amour.*

'The slightest emotion should be anticipated by eye and lip. How could this be otherwise with two such souls as theirs?'

The Princess nodded. 'Oh, Nicolas, I understand that!' she murmured, with half-closed eyes, and looking very anxious. 'But continue, I am listening.'

'Well—slight disagreements arose; tears, reproaches followed; the tender complaint in touching tones, "You love me no longer!" came ever more frequently from their lips. Their hearts, too highly strung, felt wounded at the least fluctuation in the atmosphere of affection, called the slightest opposition from the other coldness or obstinacy. Neither could understand how

it was possible to be so hard, so unloving, as not to yield willingly on every point; to be so cruel as to see the other suffer without immediate surrender. Reconciliation followed, ardent protestations; the flames of love rose higher than ever. Bathed in tears, they threw themselves into each other's arms, implored forgiveness, renewed vows of love—heart pressed to heart, with smiling lips, happy as two children.

'But it was only a pause in the storm!

'Ah! those quarrels, day after day they were renewed. For the merest trifle they were plunged into fire and flame; the slightest contradiction roused angry feelings, which sprang up at the least touch, like the fiery steed under the spur of his rider.'

The Princess shook her head. 'What

'They wanted, Nicolas, was a friend, an experienced friend, to open their eyes; they were too young, too *exigéant*—they were killing each other for very love.'

'Fortunately, there was one link to bridge over the abyss which their childish rage had opened, one mutual ground upon which these two passionate hearts could always meet—music.

'Constantine had the deepest feelings of the two; his passion was less visible, but his heart bled inwardly, and the pain had a more lasting effect upon him than upon his lovely young wife, who, more demonstrative, was rendered almost beside herself at the smallest trifle.

'Sometimes the unhappy young husband, weary of this perpetual strife, would retire

to his room in solitude, and take his beloved violin from its case, to soothe his trouble by the melancholy strains which sorrow suggested.

'Mélanie sits in the room he has left, her burning face buried in her hands, weeping the bitterest tears, sobbing like a child as those sweet tones fall upon her ear. Soft emotions reign in her bosom—she starts up, glides to the door of her husband's room—upon the threshold she stands a minute listening, with rapt attention—she can see his grave countenance, pale with sorrow, she can tell how he is suffering—he, whom a few minutes ago she had called cruel and cold, suffers for her sake. Her bosom heaves—her eyes sparkle through their veil of tears—she stretches

out her arms to him, and in plaintive tones exclaims:

'"Constantine—my beloved!"

'She is in his arms, her lips pressed to his, her head upon his breast.

'Or he comes to her as she lies upon the sofa, bathed in tears, making herself miserable over a trifle—he speaks to her as to a child, kindly, lovingly—he takes her hand—she tears it away passionately. At last, in despair, he turns to leave her with the reproach: "You love me no longer!" He has scarcely reached the door when Mélanie's arms are round his neck, in a passion of remorse and love.'

CHAPTER IX.

JEALOUSY.

'Oh! what god,
Angry with men, hath sent this strange disease
Into the noblest minds.'

CHAPTER IX.

JEALOUSY.

THE Princess knit her brows, murmuring to herself. She shivered, and drew her shawl closely round her, as if the presage of coming fate was upon her, and then nodded to me to continue.

'Yes,' I began afresh; 'the Baroness was seized with that fatal malady, of which a German poet says:

"Dasz sie mit Eifer sucht, was Leiden schafft!"

'Her husband was the sort of man who women universally admire, tall, slender, elegant—with chiselled features and dark passionate eyes. Before he had a wife, he had been much sought after by the ladies, and with most of them the adoration was not in the least disturbed because he was married.

'There were also some hearts—indeed many—which were warmly attached to him, which would gladly have beat against his—for life.

'And then—when he drew his magic bow across the strings, eliciting those wonderful tones, had not he power over all hearts?—did not all looks hang entranced upon him? When he ended there was a moment of breathless stillness, broken only

by a slight sound of emotion. Then they crowded round him, almost overwhelming him with effusive praise. Lovely eyes were raised to his, full of enthusiastic admiration.

'At first Mélanie saw all this with pride, but soon a feeling of uneasiness arose, and at last the green-eyed monster, jealousy, took possession of her. She was ashamed at first to speak openly—she tried woman's art.

'"Shall you play this evening?" she asked coaxingly.

'"They have begged me to do so!"

'"Oh yes, they will always do that. But do you not think, dear Constant, that they go a little too far in their demands?"

'"How so, Lanie?"

'"Well, I fancy they invite us more for our talents than for ourselves."

'"And why not, Lanie? As Mademoiselle Dutée said: 'It gives me so little trouble and affords them so much pleasure,'" said he, smiling.

'"Who was Mademoiselle Dutée?"

'"Oh! a very lovely young lady! She lived at the end of the last century, and was guillotined. But she only crossed my mind, dear Lanie—come, give me a kiss!"

'He took her in his arms, and she raised to him the ruby chalice of her lips.

'"But, Constant, do not let us play to-night!" she began again, after a pause, watching him furtively from under her long lashes—a true daughter of Eve!

'He looked down upon her, his eyes

gazing into hers as if to penetrate their very depths; at first smilingly, but suddenly with a more serious expression.

'"What is the matter, Lanie?" he inquired anxiously, as he saw something in her look which appeared strange to him.

'Her eyes sank beneath his, and she slightly shrugged her shoulders, like a naughty child.

'"It is nothing, Constant — I only thought——"

'"Well!"

'She smiled at him with her lovely, gleaming eyes.

'"Do you know—Cousin Thaddeus always said ——"

'"*What* did Cousin Thaddeus always say?"

'"He called you—a *Bratenbarden!*" she answered hesitatingly, and blushing rosy red.

'Her husband laughed merrily till the tears stood in his eyes.

'"So you consider me also a *Bratenbarden?*" he said, highly amused. "The idea is too good, Lanie! What a pity never heard it before!"

'He laughed again heartily, and his mirth was so infectious that she at last joined in freely, and kissed him.

'"Cousin Thaddeus is an absurd fellow, Lanie; but I would not do it so cheaply—the bard deserves something more than a slice of roast meat."

'He spoke jestingly, but Mélanie caught up his words, and her face clouded over.

She freed herself from his embrace, and threw a suspicious look upon him.

'"I can easily believe that," she said coldly. "And before you were married you could do as you liked, but now you are *my* husband, *I* must have a voice in the matter!"

'"But, Lanie!" cried he, half-amused and half-astonished, as he laid his hands upon her shoulders and examined her countenance more closely.

'She was abashed by his gaze, for she felt that her conduct must appear very strange and a little childish. She looked into his true, honest eyes, smiled again, and clung tenderly to him.

'"Constant!"

'"What is it, darling?'

'"Do not let us play to-night," she entreated.

'He shook his head in wonder, and a serious expression came over his face.

'"You wish it," he said slowly; "very well, so it shall be!"

'She danced around him for joy like a child; she clapped her hands, and kissed his lips and his forehead.

'But the husband continued serious and thoughtful. At last she left him and sat herself down in a corner, pouting at what she called his ill-humour.

'That evening, to the sorrow of all, there was no music. Constantine von Gleichen excused himself on the plea of headache—his wife had prevailed. But no one dreamed that she was the cause of

that pain, more of the heart than of the head.

'Mélanie was wise enough to know that such excuses would not last long, and she must find some other means of keeping her husband to herself. She surprised him by the declaration that so much society exhausted and wearied her, that she must not go out much, and when she did, must not play.

'But, to her horror, she soon found out that her last plan was a mistake, for many others were always ready to supply her place at the piano while her husband played the violin, and especially the captivating young widow, Frau von Wense. However harmless his earlier connection with her might have been, and however

blameless one. Mélanie could not look upon it in a Christian spirit.

She was tormented with jealousy, she turned pale, her eyes glowed with rage, when she saw the fair widow approach the piano in her stead.

She watched her with jealous eyes as she smiled upon her husband—very familiarly, so it seemed to Mélanie—as she stood for a moment in conversation with him, as she coquettishly took off her gloves and drew the glittering bracelets from her lovely white arms, as she once more smiled upon him and then took her place at the instrument.

Mélanie was almost frantic with jealous passion. The two played together in a masterly style—but to Mélanie it seemed

only a confused noise. Her brow alone was gloomy, while the faces of all the other listeners beamed with transport. Darker still was her frown, when the piece was over, and every one surrounded the performers, overwhelming them with congratulations. She remained still in her seat, pale as death, almost fainting.

'"What is the matter, Lanie?" inquired her husband, terrified at her pale, convulsed features.

'"Let us go! I am stifling!" she gasped painfully, as she hastened towards the door.

'Her husband followed her.

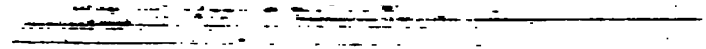
'That evening there was a fearful scene at home. For the first time a new phase in his wife's character was revealed

[illegible] the [illegible] part of the astonished [illegible]. He had [illegible] from a [illegible].

CHAPTER X.

THE CLOUD DARKENS.

'In aught that from me lures thine eyes,
My jealousy has trial;
The lightest cloud across the skies
Has darkness for the dial.



CHAPTER X.

THE CLOUD DARKENS.

'FROM that time Constantine seldom played away from home; when he did so, his wife always accompanied him. The pleasure he had hitherto taken in music was gone.

'Mélanie herself that evening had been terrified at the rapid growth, the gigantic proportions, of the unhappy passion which had seized her. She went about trembling and ashamed—she tried hard to get the

mastery of herself; but when she sat at the piano again, as usual, to accompany her husband, her eyes glittered ominously, and her gaze wandered suspiciously from the notes, now to her husband, now to the audience.

'Never had he appeared more handsome in her eyes, never had she loved him more passionately—oh! if those tones had been for herself alone! But when she saw all eyes, especially ladies', fixed on him with devotion, with enthusiasm, eyes moist with tears—suddenly a wild pang seized her, which she could not overcome in spite of all her struggles.

'A mist came over her eyes, her hands began to tremble, the notes danced before her, her bosom rose and sank in passion-

ıte throbs. Like a whirlwind she dashed her fingers over the keys, rushed on with flying speed until the piece was ended—then rose from the piano, pale as death, with a cold, nervous smile upon her lips.

'To her husband, playing in this fashion became very unpleasant; sometimes he did not touch his instrument for weeks together. He grew melancholy; upon his brow there gathered a cloud of anxiety. A storm had arisen in the serene heaven of their marriage bliss; a heavy threatening cloud enveloped them in its dark folds.

'Every day there were quarrels, recriminations, scenes of violent passion; till at last *his* patience gave way, and his sorrow rose to a pitch of morbid sensibility.

'If the arrow perpetually rankles in the old wound, patience becomes despair.'

The Princess groaned, and said, as she leant back in her easy-chair:

'How true is the old Russian proverb, Nicolas, "*La cuillerée de goudron finit toujours par tomber dans le tonneau de miel!*"'

'Their married life was like the stormy ocean, where, without rest or repose, the waves ceaselessly roll on. Now, quick as the lightning-flash, they rear their foam-capped crests in menace—now they mingle in the repose of perfect calm. They fly to each other, they embrace, they are one; then the inward force severs them, tears them apart; with menacing roar they lift their heads once more—then again the

strife is over, the wild foaming waters obey the command, "Peace, be still!"

'"You do not love me—you have never loved me!" cried Mélanie, when her husband opposed her slightest wish. "Unhappy wretch that I am—he loves me not!" she wailed. Without noticing the troubled face of her husband, she thus goaded him to madness, till he sprang up, pierced to the heart by her bitter reproaches. How could this noble, refined woman have found such evil words, and how could she forget the sufferings she must inevitably bring upon herself?

'How many thousands of times did she make firm resolutions of amendment; how often did she throw herself on her knees in self-accusation before her God! And how

often did he, the young husband, draw her tenderly to his heart with soothing words: "Come, beloved, let us try to forget and forgive. We love one another indeed—we would so gladly see each other happy. Let us avoid strife—else we both go to ruin."

'Yes, they did indeed go to ruin, Olga Petrowna! Had Heaven but sent them a child, it would have been a link between them—but no . . .

'One night they had been in society, and Mélanie thought she had cause for jealousy—she raved and stormed. Her husband remonstrated kindly with her, but at last he also became excited, and returned reproach for reproach. After this outburst, he composed himself again, and remained quite still, making no reply to her bitter

taunts. This apparent indifference rendered the passionate girl almost beside herself with rage; she loaded him with insults; she charged him with having deceived her. He was a coward—dishonourable—worse than a murderer. A murderer killed his victim at one blow, he destroyed her slowly, pang by pang. So far did her ungovernable temper carry her.

'Then, to her astonishment, her husband rose slowly, took his cloak, and, without a word, left her and went out, though it was the middle of winter.

'For a moment she was speechless—brought back to her right senses. She sat and gazed after him—she listened. Everything was still—she heard nothing but the beating of her own heart.

'"Constant!" she cried . . . "Consta[illegible] you will freeze to death!" in accents, first commanding, then softening in[illegible] entreaty.

'But no answer came—all was still.

'A terrible fear seized the young wife[illegible] her cheeks glowed with fire, and her heart was heavy as lead.

'"Constant!" she cried once more, in tones of despair.

'Still no reply.

'The next moment she sprang from her couch and glided towards the door—she opened it gently and looked out—all was dark, no sound was heard. With trembling hands she found the box of matches upon the stove, and lit a taper.

'There lay her husband upon a couch,

in that icy room, wrapped only in his cloak, his features distorted with pain.

'She forgot that she herself was standing with bare feet, in thin night attire—she thought only of him. She threw herself on her knees by his side, and seized his hand.

'He did not move—he knitted his dark brows, and drew his hand angrily away.

'Full of remorse and despair, she cried once more:

'"Constant, I beg your forgiveness—I have done you wrong."

'He gazed at her with a strange look, which pierced her inmost soul.

'Then, for the first time, he noticed how thinly clad she was, while without the snow

was failing: a light gleamed in his eye, and he breathed heavily.

'In stern tones he said: "Go back and sleep!"

'She looked at him mournfully, and shook her head.

'"Forgive me, Constant!"

'"Go back and sleep!" he reiterated angrily. "You will catch your death of cold, unhappy woman!"

'"Forgive me first, I pray you," she implored, with a burst of tears.

'Without a word he sprang up, seized his wife in his strong arms, and carried her back to her room. She remained still as a mouse in his embrace, murmuring in his

'"Forgive . . . forgive!" while the hot tears fell upon his neck.

'He laid her down upon her pillow—she held him fast.

'"Forgive me, Constant!" she pleaded.

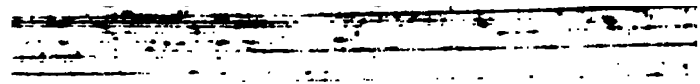
'And . . . poor fool—he forgave her.'

CHAPTER XI.

THE SEPARATION.

'To be angry with those we love
Doth work like madness on the brain.'

'I only know we loved in vain,
I only feel Farewell! farewell!'



CHAPTER XI.

THE SEPARATION.

'It is written somewhere in the Bible that when the devil is driven out of a man, and has returned to him again, he brings with him a dozen of his fellows, and the last state of that man is worse than the first.

'For a short time peace reigned—then the storm broke out afresh. One day they were sitting at table, when Mélanie made a sarcastic remark about Frau von Wense, which Constantine resented, and defended

the unjustly accused lady. On this a perfect hurricane arose, the vials of wrath were poured upon his head.

'Her eyes flashing with anger, in paroxysm of passion, Mélanie so far forgot herself as to throw the knife she held in her hand at her husband. It struck him on the cheek, just below the eye—the blood streamed down his face.

'Mélanie became pale with horror, she uttered an inarticulate cry—her knees trembled—she could not move.

'Her husband cast upon her one reproachful look, without a word drew the knife from the wound while the blood poured forth in a stream, held his handkerchief firmly to his face, and with gloomy brow, still in silence, turned to go.

'She stood there, a picture of grief and terror, her hands clasped, her eyes dilated . . horrified at herself and her wicked deed. She strove in vain for words . . . She could not speak.

'Constantine's glance fell upon his unhappy wife, speechless from terror and remorse — anger left him, his heart was moved with pity—he stepped towards her, put his arm round her, and drew her gently to his heart.

'"Come, Lanie, never mind," he said tenderly, kissing her upon the forehead; "do not trouble about it."

'But she remained motionless, an icy numbness seemed to paralyse her frame.

'Constantine pitied her from the depths of his soul; he knew what was passing in

that wayward heart, and felt deep compa[illegible]s-
sion for the lovely, unhappy being, a slav[illegible]ve
to her own passions. Perhaps, too, he wa[illegible] as
glad that a crisis had come, that she coul[illegible]ld
see with her own eyes to what a crim[illegible]ne
uncontrolled anger might lead her. Th[illegible]he
pain of his wound was forgotten, as h[illegible]he
witnessed her silent agony. It might be [illegible] a
warning to her—there might be hope fo[illegible]r
the future.

'With one hand pressed to his cheek, he held her firmly embraced with the other.

'"Lanie, my poor child," he said, kissing her, "have you terrified yourself so much? Come, be a brave woman—it is but a trifle, a scratch of the skin, nothing more."

'Some time elapsed before his wife recovered her senses, before her eyes lost

their rigid expression, before tears came to her relief.

'Ah, then, how she sobbed—how she accused herself—how she bewailed her evil temper—how she threw herself at her husband's feet and vowed amendment!

'He raised her from the ground and tried to comfort her.

'But Mélanie *would* not be comforted—she was overwhelmed with shame and horror. One inch farther, and the knife would have entered his eye—she might have killed him.

'And he—what an angel of goodness he was . . . to forgive her all so nobly! Never had she loved him so much, never had she seemed more despicable in her own eyes.

'Three months passed away; she became

pale and thin—her spirits were quite broken. She suffered agonies—she was perpetually on guard against herself, against her passionate temper—she almost sank under the effort of continual suppression.

'The Baron became very anxious at the sight of his wife's sad, pale face, and he took her away to Baden-Baden for a change of scene. Here, in the lovely country and glorious air, Mélanie seemed to revive; the colour came back to her cheeks, and her spirits recovered their lively tone. The load of care fell from her husband; all seemed going on well; he believed her to be quite cured.

'But no—he rejoiced too soon. Poor fellow, the fates were against him.

'One day, when they were walking arm-

-arm along the gay street, an open carriage et them. Two ladies sat in it, one of em a blonde of rare beauty, who uttered joyful cry when she saw them, and dered the coachman to stop.

'It was Frau von Wense.

'The greeting was to all appearance ost cordial, even on Mélanie's side; but ere was a strange gleam in her eyes, hich boded disaster.

'From that hour all was changed. The vil demon again took possession of Mélanie's soul.

'Passion she could conquer; jealousy, ever.

'All barriers were broken down; the waters overflowed; chaos had come.

'After a few days Mélanie, with gloomy

brow and compressed lips, came to her husband, and asked him to leave Baden-Baden. When he remonstrated with her, she answered coldly:

'"Very well, you stay here—I will go alone."

'With face deadly pale, but preserving his calmness, he answered, with equal coldness:

'"So be it; we will go."

'"Oh, do not disturb yourself for my sake," she burst forth, as she saw how he was moved; "but—it seems to me—that we are only a burden to one another. We make ourselves wretched — we torment each other to death!"

'And then fell from her lips, for the first time, the fatal words:

'"We should do better, under these circumstances, to separate."

'In her passion she scarcely knew what she said.

'Her husband gazed at her for a moment with a grave, serious expression, and then went out without answering a word. She had given him a deadly blow.

'They left the place; she, glad at heart —he, pale and wretched.

'Unhappy, suspicious wife! As his sadness continued, she took it into her head that he was angry because she had separated him from Frau von Wense; she brooded over her wrongs, and fanned the flame of jealousy that was consuming her.

'Day after day the misery increased.

During the long, sleepless nights, his thoughts ran thus:

'"She is right—our life is wretched. Can we love each other, if the result is only unhappiness? Can this be true love? Love bears all, endures all, is patient through all. Would it not be best—would it not be right—even a duty—to give Mélanie back her freedom? Is she not wretched with me? Great God of mercy! what shall I do? Give me Thy counsel—what shall I do?"

'He was in a dangerous frame of mind.

'Mélanie, blinded by jealousy and evil temper, took offence at every syllable he uttered, at everything he did. The fatal word—separation—came again and again from her lips.

'"You are right, Mélanie," answered her husband one evening, with brow full of care, and lips quivering with pain; "it *is* sinful. Our life is a mistake—every day it becomes worse between us—I see no other course. We are so far sundered that we can never be the same to one another again. It shall be as you wish—we will separate!"

'He stood before her with a grave countenance, his brows knit together, his arms crossed upon his breast.

'She looked at him, turned pale and red by turns, then rose quickly and went out. The door closed behind her, she shut herself in her own room. For several days they did not meet. How inexpressibly they both suffered!

'They did not separate immediately, Olga Petrowna; they had several more quarrels and reconciliations. But at last, after one fearful scene, Mélanie, weeping bitterly, packed up a few things secretly in the night, and the next morning was gone.

'She wrote to her husband from her first stopping-place, saying that she saw they could not live together. She would not be guilty of the sin of making his whole life unhappy, therefore she renounced all claim upon him, and was on her way to her own relations.'

'*Une folle! Grand Dieu!*' groaned the Princess. 'Had she no friend near her, no kind soul who could warn her? No one? Poor child! And he, poor fellow,

for he loved her, Nicolas, and—she had left him!'

'It was a fearful blow for Constantine. It seemed like some terrible dream. Mélanie gone—he could not realise it. He knew that in her heart she loved him, tenderly, passionately—that even the continual strife was only the result of excessive, ill-regulated love; how was it possible that she could have left him? But yet—it was true—she was really gone.

'Three, four days passed, and she did not return. Every hour he was on the point of hastening after her. But if she were to repulse him—to persist in her resolution—what then? It was too soon yet; he must let her blind folly run its course. She loved him, her heart was

own accord.

'He wrote to her—a long, touching letter. He waited and waited, with ever-increasing anxiety, but he received no answer—not one line.'

The Princess raised herself in astonishment.

'He wrote again and again; he begged, he implored her to return, with the most touching entreaties—still no reply. Then, at last, one day he received a letter; it bore the postmark of a little place in the neighbourhood of Kowno, near her estates. He knew the writing very well, the pointed, crabbed hand of Mélanie's uncle.

'With trembling hands the injured hus-

hand broke the seal—hot tears stood in his eyes—a cry of pain and anger escaped his lips—there was not one line from Mélanie.

'He read the letter. The uncle, good man, was courtesy and sympathy itself. He spoke first of Mélanie's passionate character, which had always flamed up at the smallest trifle, and then as suddenly subsided; next, of the deep anxiety which had already been caused by this cardinal failing, to the eradication of which the whole of her earlier education in his house had been directed in vain.

'He went on to deplore the haste with which the Baron, attracted by Mélanie's charms, had married her against the wish of her relatives, without knowing a little more of her ardent nature. In the intoxi-

cation of passion many things had bee[illegible]n done which in cooler moments would hav[illegible]ve been avoided. Their youth and ardou[illegible]ur might plead as their excuse, but could no[illegible]ot shift the consequences upon others.

'The Baron must remember that no[illegible]o blame could be attached to him or his[illegible]is wife; they had both seriously dissuaded[illegible]d Mélanie from the step, for, not to mention[illegible]n that it would have pleased them much[illegible]h better had she married one of their own[illegible]n people, a man of more practical character[illegible] (the Baron would pardon him), they had almost with certainty predicted how it would be—that both parties must be unhappy—their characters were utterly unsuited to one another. The result unfortunately justified their fears.

'His niece had arrived at their house quite unexpectedly, in an indescribable state of agitation, but yet firmly resolved to free herself from a bond which must, she clearly affirmed, at last bring both to destruction.

'His letters only agitated Mélanie, without in the slightest degree altering her determination. And he himself, though he would desire to remain neutral in such a painful matter, could, after much consideration, only agree with her. For both parties it would be the only right course.

'He therefore begged the Baron to familiarise himself gradually with the idea; to consider that it would be altogether impossible, after the step his niece had taken, for them to live together again.

'He requested, nay, he demanded of him before all things, to write no more to Mélanie. She herself made the same petition, for his letters only excited her, injured her already shattered health, without—and that he must positively affirm—altering her resolution, which was as firm as a rock.

'These were the contents of the letter.

'One can imagine what a crushing effect this had upon a heart so sensitive, so deeply wounded as Constantine's.

'Desolate, saddened, broken-hearted, he passed the next few days as though in a frightful dream. So even his letters were returned coldly: she allowed her uncle to write—a third person—a stranger—almost

an enemy. It was not mere defiance—no—it was hardness of heart!

'And he had fondly imagined that she loved him—loved him even now! Ah! and he—how much he loved her—loved her still, in spite of all.

'After some time he took his resolution. He would see Mélanie once more, would speak to her himself, would hear from her own lips the fatal word that should part them for ever.

'He threw himself on horseback, and journeyed for three days and three nights towards Kowno. Only a few miles now separated him from his wife. From this place he sent her a letter containing all that would suggest itself to a noble, loving, self-denying heart in such a position. The last words were:

'"I am here—speak but the word, and I am at your feet. All shall be forgiven and forgotten!"

'In a state of feverish agitation he waited for an answer; life or death depended upon it.

'The uncle himself arrived.

'With an angry countenance he entered the room where the Baron was sitting.

'"In Heaven's name, what have you done?" were his first words. "Did you not receive my letter, or did you think I spoke to the winds? Come with me and look upon your work. I will listen to no vindication. I insist, Herr nephew, that you come with me and see with your own eyes the mischief your fatal letters have

wrought! God grant that Mélanie may recover!"

'He pushed the wretched young man into his carriage, almost stunned with despair, and they drove off rapidly to his estate.

'There the Baron saw Mélanie again.

'She lay on her bed, dangerously ill, a prey to the wildest ravings of delirium.

'Her aunt, the doctor, and a sister of mercy stood around her couch, with anxious, tear-stained faces.

'"See what you have done!" whispered the uncle in his ear, passing his hand across his eyes. "That is your work, Herr Nephew!"

'The women turned upon him their

tearful, reproachful looks; the doctor took him aside and appealed to him.

'At last Cousin Thaddeus, out of compassion, led the half-dead, heart-broken husband back to Kowno, promising to keep him informed of his wife's condition.

'He remained there for a whole month in a state of the deepest misery, and then, when Thaddeus had informed him that Mélanie was out of danger, he returned to Berlin, crushed—broken down—a misanthrope!

'The uncle hastened on the separation in Mélanie's name. He met with no difficulties. The Baron agreed to everything; he only made one condition, that he must see his wife's signature before putting his own name to the document.

'Poor man, he little knew the excellent uncle!

'He saw the signature—it was genuine—he added his own.

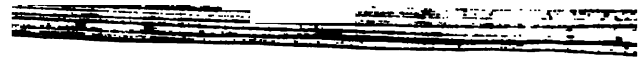
'Thus were these two parted.'

CHAPTER XII.

THE WEB OF TREACHERY.

'A man may smile and smile,
And be a villain.'

'She only said: "My life is dreary;
He cometh not," she said.'



CHAPTER XII.

THE WEB OF TREACHERY.

THE Princess sighed deeply.

'But, Nicolas, the Baroness — how could she be so hard-hearted as to destroy herself and her husband too?'

'Ah, Princess, it was a villanous plot on the part of her relations. This is Mélanie's story:

'She left him, as I have already related, in defiance and anger; she wanted to make him feel her loss. Her unhappy nature

craved for scenes, for demonstrations—quiet domestic love palled upon her. But she was no sooner gone than she repented. She waited a whole day at Berlin, hoping that he would hasten after her, would fall at her feet, and she—she would then forgive him.

'But when night came and he appeared not, with lowering brow she commanded her maid to prepare for departure. In blind obstinacy she set out on her journey to her relations; to know that she was with them would give additional pain to her husband.

'She arrived there after a long, troublesome journey, worn out with fatigue; the remembrance of her husband's love, the stings of her guilty conscience, had brought

her into a highly nervous state of exhaustion and agitation.

'She waited hourly, with ever-increasing anguish, in expectation of seeing her husband, or receiving a letter—if only one line—from him. She pined for reconciliation, but nothing, nothing came.

'The greedy relations received the infatuated girl with open arms. They overwhelmed her with hypocritical sympathy, with false compassion; they mourned over her, and spoke of happpiness, of content.

'So passed many fearful days for Mélanie.

'She had left him—she had injured, tortured him. Oh how bitterly she now repented! how she longed after him—

pined for one kind word—one look—one kiss! Ah! how devotedly she loved him now! How inexpressibly dear he was to her now!

'Had she not been quite sure that Constantine *would* come after her—*must* come, she would have gone back at once in search of him, to implore his pardon, to promise amendment, to tell him how much she loved him.

'Of his many letters she received not a single one.

'At last she wrote to him, poured out her soul in a torrent of self-reproach, of deep sorrow and repentance. She was sure it only needed one word from her, and Constantine would forgive all and hasten to her side.

'She waited from day to day.

'He did not come—not one line reached her.

'Mélanie now became almost distracted—she wrote again and again.

'Still no word from him—no sign of life.

'It seemed as if he were dead.

'She was now painfully convinced that Constantine would not see her, would not write to her—that he had cast her off for ever.

'She was now bent upon starting off to seek him, to see him with her own eyes, to plead with her own voice; but her relations would not allow her to depart, and the doctor strictly forbade it.

'For a new bright gleam of hope had

risen before her. In a delirium of ecstasy mingled with pain, she discovered what to women who love their husbands bestows on them such unmixed happiness.'

The Princess looked up inquiringly.

'That she was about to become a mother.

'With trembling hands she wrote the news to her husband, and lost herself in golden dreams of anticipation, counting the days and hours that must elapse before he could be with her.

'She amused herself by thinking how the news would surprise the obstinate man; how happy and at the same time how ashamed he would be; how he would rejoice, and immediately hasten to her on the wings of love!

'Ah! how could she think otherwise!

'But, unhappy creature, she hoped and waited in vain.

'Her husband came not—he came not—not even now. He wrote not a word. Terrible thoughts distracted her soul. He had never loved her—he was glad to be free, rid of a burden.

'The blow was too heavy for Mélanie to bear. Her mind and her body alike gave way; she became dangerously ill. She lay for days together, without consciousness, in the wild delirium of fever, at the point of death.

'And in that state her husband saw her.

'The scene was well arranged. That

illness happened most opportunely for her relations.'

'Abominable wretches!' cried the Princess, with an impetuous movement.

'Yes, dear Princess, they were wretches indeed.

'The uncle, striving by every means in his power to obtain the control of his niece's property, had systematically intercepted the correspondence between these unhappy young people. Every letter passed into his hands, and was quietly consigned to the flames. He was determined that this union, so fatal to his interests, should be brought to an end. The marriage must be dissolved, and he set himself to do it.

'Mélanie recovered at last, and they then began to talk to her, to appeal to her pride, to tell her it was due to herself to press for a judicial separation. They worked also upon her feelings; it was not only a duty to herself, but also to her husband. She must set him free; she must not wait until he demanded it of her. Her honour, her reputation were at stake.

'Poor Mélanie! At her wits' end with remorse and despair, she at last consented —she set him free.'

'But, good heavens, Nicolas! why did not the woman start off even then to her husband—demand an interview with him —tell him of her sorrow and her repentance?'

'So she would have done even now for her child's sake, as well as her own, had not those wicked relations stood in the way. They had craft enough to hinder any approach to reconciliation; and then, remember, Mélanie was quite broken down with pain and grief, powerless in their hands.

'Everything was as they wished—the separation was complete.

'So those two were parted, separated for all time, torn asunder by wicked men, who sought to gain benefit to themselves from the misery they had caused.

'But their plans only partially succeeded.

'Cousin Thaddeus in vain attempted once more to ingratiate himself with the

widowed Mélanie. In vain he swore again and again to take away his life; the Baroness was not to be persuaded into a second marriage. She lived now only for her child, the little Nina, cherishing the remembrances of past joys.

'At last she married the Baron von Maszmann, to save her child from being plundered by her own relations. The veil had fallen from her eyes; she saw them in their true character, and learnt at last how shamefully they had acted towards her. But the enlightening came too late!'

At this moment I felt a little hand upon my shoulder. I started in surprise and looked up. The Countess d'Alois stood behind me, ready dressed for going out.

'I must beg that this conversation be

postponed to some other time—the carriage has been waiting for half an hour,' she said, smiling.

I, absorbed in my story, and the Princess, listening with closed eyes, had not noticed her approach.

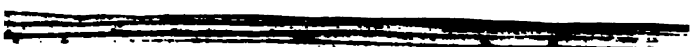
'Another time,' murmured Olga Petrowna, giving me her hand. '*Au revoir, mon ami:* thank you very much!'

I conducted the ladies to their carriage, and then threw myself into another to return to Hélène. Time had passed so quickly during my narrative, that it had become quite late.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE CLOUD WITH THE SILVER LINING.

'Love shall be purified by pain,
And pain be soothed by love again.'



CHAPTER XIII.

THE CLOUD WITH THE SILVER LINING.

ONE day we all drove to the Palazzo Pitti, to see the magnificent treasures which it contains.

After a time the Princess beckoned to me.

'The air of these rooms stifles me,' she said, fanning herself. Take me into the garden, Nicolas; the sun has gone down, and I think it will be very pleasant.'

We descended the broad steps, and were

soon lost amid the leafy foliage of one of the many beautiful shaded walks. We reached an elevated spot near the fountain, from which we could enjoy one of the most magnificent views in the world.

We sat down upon a grassy bank, and for some moments gazed silently out into the far distance.

Suddenly the Princess turned to me.

'I should like to hear the rest of the story, Nicolas, and to learn how those two unhappy creatures came to meet at W——.'

I continued my narrative.

'The poor Baron, as I already informed your Highness, was utterly prostrate, broken down, a divorced man, separated from the wife whom he still passionately loved. His reason tottered upon its

throne. His country became hateful to him; he suddenly disappeared.

'He sold all his property, and sailed for America: there he had an estate in Louisiana, on which he took up his residence. Here, almost without care, he soon amassed an enormous fortune. But all the treasures in the world could not make him forget his wife. He became utterly broken in health; he was consumed by sorrow and unfulfilled longing. The physicians ordered him to Europe, and he went, first to Carlsbad, and then to W——. Never, during those long years, had he heard one word of Mélanie.

'But here fate brought him and his wife once more together.'

The Princess interrupted. 'Nicolas,'

she said, almost in a whisper, 'this is a very extraordinary and touching story.'

'You are right, Olga Petrowna; shall I finish the tale?'

'Yes; go on, Nicolas.'

'Your Highness will remember that in W——, at that time, there was a stranger, eccentric in look and manner. He had sometimes spoken to little Nina in the street. As the governess informed us afterwards, at the first sight of the child he suddenly stood still, as if petrified, while a look, almost of terror, flitted across his stern features. At first he only asked her name; the child told him she was called Nina von Maszmann. Her name was really Constantia, which had been shortened into Nina.

'It was very strange. The child at first was much terrified at the dark, gloomy man with the long black beard, but after a time she ran to him with delight whenever she saw him.

'As strange, also, was the touching expression with which he would sometimes fix his deep melancholy eyes upon the child, as though wrapped in painful reflection.

'He lived a strange, melancholy life at W——, spoke to no one, had no doctor, although evidently a sufferer, and took long solitary walks. Even in such a curious little place as W——, he would hardly have been noticed, had there not been something striking in his tall, bent figure, his yellow, haggard countenance,

with hollow cheeks, sunken eyes, and wild tangled beard.

'The people with whom he lodged had at first somewhat feared this grave tenant, but in time became attracted to him, on account of his gentle, unassuming manners. They said so afterwards to the Frau von Baniutin, when all was over, when the Baron von Maszmann had gone to his grave. Those long walks and his music—the violoncello, you know—were his only pleasures.

'Good Frau Köhler said herself, she was not a little astonished, and very pleased, when one morning he commissioned her to procure him a ticket for "Il Trovatore."

'There, in the theatre, they met again. Fate had brought them together.

'In a box opposite to him was seated a young, lovely creature, with a sad, sorrowful expression of countenance. There she sat, surrounded by brightness and splendour.

'By chance his eyes fell upon her—his blood stagnated—his heart stopped beating. He raised himself from his seat—his gaze was fixed upon that form—his eyes almost started from their sockets—an indescribable tremor agitated his whole frame.

'Was it possible? Yes, it was she—without doubt—his wife—Mélanie.

'He became as pale as death, uttered an inarticulate cry, and fell into a swoon.

'That cry was heard through the whole house, and reached the ear of the Baroness. She looked up and saw a man, in a box

opposite, fall back in a fainting fit—a stranger.

'Such a scene in a theatre always causes a sensation, and the nerves of the lady were strangely excited. They carried the unconscious man out; the strains of music filled the house, but that cry was sounding in her ears; it seemed as if a chord had been suddenly struck in her bosom, and was still vibrating there—a tone which drew her very heart-strings. Music and spectators, light and brightness, disappeared from before her eyes; she saw only that pale, haggard face, she heard only that mournful cry.

'For a while she sat thus lost in reflection; then, all at once, a cold shiver came over her—she turned suddenly pale

—her eyes gleamed with an unnatural brightness. All became dark, a rushing sound came in her ears; with a strong effort she kept herself from fainting.

'"You are unwell, gracious lady?" said a compassionate voice.

'"It is nothing—it is nothing," she replied, and endeavoured to compose herself.

'Fortunately, at this moment the curtain fell.

'She hastened out, declining all assistance. While waiting for her carriage, at the entrance to the theatre, she inquired after the stranger who had fainted. They told her he was an American, a Mr. Constantine Williams; he had already been taken in a carriage to his apartments, No. 4, Garden Road.

'In a state of extreme agitation she reached her home.

'"Constantine Williams!—Constantine! Great God! it was he!"

'A cry of pain escaped her. She saw again that pale countenance, like a dead man.

'Was that her handsome husband, her dearly-loved Constantine? Was it possible? Was that all that remained of his former self? Or was she deceived by a dream—a fancied resemblance?

'No, no! A voice within her cried loudly:

'"It is he—it is he—the loved one—my husband—and he is miserable!"

'A thought shot through her mind.

'He had seen her—yes, it was certain.

The whole scene came back to her—he had seen her—had recognised her. It must have been the sight of her that had caused this fainting fit; he had experienced the same emotions at the unexpected meeting as she was now feeling, and it had overcome him.

'The hot tears flowed from her eyes.

'"Merciful Heaven! is it possible?" she cried aloud.

'All the harm that he had done her, all, all was forgotten in a moment. The fountains of her heart were opened; a flood of compassion, of love gushed forth.

'"I must have certainty—I must see him!" she cried, wringing her hands, and

walking with hasty steps up and down the room.

'A thousand remembrances, a thousand varied feelings, agitated her soul. The iron band which for years had lain upon her heart was loosed at last. She breathed —she lived again—she hoped.

'To him — to him! was her only thought.

'Impulsive, loving woman, she forget everything else.

'Hastily throwing on a cloak and veil, she inquired the way to Garden Road, and proceeded there as fast as her feet could carry her. As she approached the house, she saw lights in the rooms above, and shadows moving to and fro. In the confusion the door had been left open; she entered.

'Step by step she slowly ascended the stairs, no one saw her.

'Upon the landing above a small lamp burned dimly, and a bright gleam shone through an open doorway.

'Breathlessly she approached — she looked in—there—there upon the sofa lay a pale form—by his side two women were occupied in restoring consciousness. The light fell clearly upon his emaciated features. Her hands convulsively clasped the door-post; she swayed like a willow in the storm.

'"Yes—there was no further doubt—it was her husband, Constantine—no stranger —no Mr. Williams."

'Ah! the eyes of love cannot be deceived!

'"Merciful God! how he had changed in these few years."

'A flood of tears burst from her eyes.

'Her dear husband—her heart's best beloved—the father of her child, Nina. Ah! how she had tormented him, and then left him in anger!

'These thoughts fell like coals of fire upon her soul. Had not she herself been guilty through all? Now that she had been purified by pain, she saw plainly that she, she alone, had been the cause of all the terrible unhappiness. Ever heavier grew the burden which pressed upon her heart, and weighed her down with insupportable anguish, crushing her very soul!

'The servant came out and went past

her; then followed the elder woman, who shut the door, and began to descend the stairs.

'Mélanie summoned up her courage and hastened after her; it had suddenly occurred to her that Madame Köhler had told the servant to fetch a doctor.

'"Do not send for any one," said the trembling woman, 'let me nurse the sick man, I am a distant relation of his."

'Frau Köhler gazed at her with astonishment; whence had sprung this suddenly-discovered relation; how had she entered the house? But the lady looked so respectable, her language and manners were so evidently those of a distinguished person that her suspicions were allayed. Glad to have some assistance, some one

who would relieve her of the responsibility she let her do as she liked.

'Mélanie went back and softly entered the room.

'The invalid sat there upon his sofa, meditating, his hands clasped over his aching brow. He did not immediately perceive her, and she had time to notice his dejected attitude, to see that wasted hand, on which gleamed one solitary ring, the ring which she herself had given him on the day when she told him that she—that she would be his wife.

'A tumult of indescribable feelings passed through Mélanie's soul. Was it so indeed? Did he love her still—had he loved her all these years—still wore her ring?

'One sob, one sigh of pain rose to her trembling lips from her overcharged heart.

'The sick man looked up, and gazed in surprise at that tall strange form.

'Then suddenly her veil fell—he saw Mélanie—his wife—bathed in tears—her arms longingly outstretched to him—his name upon her lips.

'"Constantine!"

'"Mélanie!"

'Ah! what pen can describe that scene!

* * * * *

'Joy did not kill him, but the present happiness could not blot out the traces which years of sorrow had marked upon his frame.

'They had found each other again, these two forsaken desolate souls—like two solitary stars which, lost for a time in illimitable space, had now again become one.

'After the first blissful moments came mutual explanations.

'Ah! what a revelation it was!

'The rest you know, Olga Petrowna.'

The Princess looked at me for a moment in silence, and then said:

'But, Nicolas, I do not understand, tell me what happened afterwards at W——. Why did not the Baroness disclose all to her second husband; he was a noble, generous, kind-hearted man, she might have trusted him. Why did she let matters come to such a fearful pass?'

I slightly shrugged my shoulders.

'She certainly had no intention of deceiving him, but then, your Highness, the situation was very delicate, and both Mélanie and Herr von Gleichen shrank from the communication.

'After that first interview and explanation, they found, upon calm reflection, that a knot had been tied by fate and by man which appeared indissoluble.

'Mélanie was in a fearful position; she had now two husbands—the one the beloved, the newly-regained, the father of her child, the man of her heart, her own before God and herself—and then the other, the fatherly friend, who loved and protected her, to whom she owed so much, her husband by the laws of man.

'She had only just found him again, her true husband; he was so ill, so miserable, and all through her.

'And for herself—poor wife! She had been unhappy for so long, she wished to temporise; she sought to gain time, to consider what she should do. Perhaps, also, she forgot everything else, for a little while, in the enjoyment of the great bliss of having him to herself alone, of tending him undisturbed.

'Unhappy lady! She had to tell him of the birth of the dear little Nina, his own child; and then, her heart torn with conflicting emotions, she had to confess the dreadful news that she had entered upon a second marriage—had another husband.

'Her difficulty also in disclosing all to Baron von Maszmann was increased, because, with woman's instinct, she must long since have divined what was passing in his heart, in spite of all his caution—that the fountain so long dried up had at last begun to flow—that he loved her with the whole power of his mature years.

'So she put it off from day to day until it was too late. She lived in a continual state of agitation, this double existence was wearing her life away, and yet she still delayed. But, meanwhile, other agents were at work, wicked tongues were whispering in her husband's ear.

'One evening, as she sat by the sick man's couch, reading to him, the door suddenly opened—a tall dark figure entered—

the fur cloak fell back — her husband, Baron von Maszmann, stood before her — pale as death—the deadly weapon in his hand.

'In dread terror she threw herself before the beloved one, sheltering his body with her own.

'"Wife! wife!" exclaimed the unhappy man, raising his hand—then suddenly the pistol slipped from his grasp—there was a shot, a report—and, mortally wounded, the Baron fell to the ground.

'All was the work of a moment, so sudden, so unexpected. Before she could collect herself, could look up, all was over.

'Baron von Maszmann lay upon the floor, weltering in his blood.

The Princess and myself sat for some

time lost in thought. The bees hummed around us, the wind softly rustled the leaves over our heads, a lovely butterfly flew from flower to flower.

'That shot, Nicolas,' began the Princess suddenly, 'was a happiness for all three, one might almost say a work of Providence. Thank you, my friend, let us go now, Hélène will miss you.'

We turned down the broad terrace towards the palace; we saw a little group entering the garden through the trellis; they beckoned to us as they approached. It was the Countess with Hélène, and the Baron with Mélanie, walking arm-in-arm, the little Nina between them.

The Princess acknowledged the greeting and then turned to me.

'You see yourself, Nicolas, how happy these two are together after all the trials that heaven has sent them. Who knows if they would ever have been so happy without them,' she said, with tears in her eyes.

She smiled and stepped towards Mélanie. She embraced her with great affection, and, a rare thing for the Princess to do, kissed her on both cheeks.

'You have a charming wife,' she then said, turning to the Baron. 'I love her as my own daughter.'

Hélène looked at me and pressed my hand.

THE END.

London: Remington & Co., 5, Arundel Street, Strand.

2